THE SOUL ENCHANTED

was written between 1921 and 1933

The English version of the work comprises five volumes:

I. ANNETTE AND SYLVIE.

II. SUMMER.

III. MOTHER AND SON.

IV. THE DEATH OF A WORLD.

V. A WORLD IN BIRTH.

A WORLD IN BIRTH

THE CONCLUDING VOLUME OF

The Soul Enchanted

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TO MARIE

Ten years of struggle against oneself.
We must fight self to overcome it.
Ten years of peace, daughter of war, mother of war.
Do not complain. Peace is at the end.

Let us go to meet it!
My friend, my wife, I offer you my wounds.
They are the best thing that life has given me.
For every one is the mark of a step forward.

R. R.

September, 1933.

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THE COMBAT

PART I

I

THE first days of their love were intoxicating. The honeymoon blazed like a sun. There was a hidden fire of alcohol in that honey. From what plant had the two bees pumped it? It was not only from the flowers of spring. Marc and Assia had both prematurely tasted the juices of summer, some of them bitter and devastating enough. Young love, mixing them in his alembic, had made of them a marvelous philter. All was new, all was pure, all was flame. Is there anything which flame does not cleanse and renew? (But what will remain, afterwards?)

They spent the days and nights like mad birds, mouth to mouth, clinging, drinking in each other's breath, clutching with all their talons, like two ships grappled together. They shut themselves in for days and nights, the window of the room slightly open, refusing to go out, refusing to open their door, devouring each other, never satiated, exhausted.

Annette, who succeeded in forcing an entry, found them on their bed—they made no attempt at concealment—drunken, haggard, happy, worn out, burning with fever and voluptuousness. And Assia, clasping her boy's head, defied Annette with wild and hungry eyes. But Annette, looking at them with tenderness, pressed both heads in her hands, and said, jerking her chin, smiling and anxious:

"My poor children . . . Don't eat up all your corn! Keep some for a bad season!"

She knew very well that they would not listen to her. She withdrew on tip-toe. She was sad and happy. She

knew the future too well. But it was a good thing that they should have the present! So much saved! She took care that they should not be disturbed. Without telling them (Assia knew it later; Marc with a man's carelessness, never did), she looked after their home during those bewildered weeks when it seemed quite natural to them that the housework should do itself, without their having to trouble themselves about it. She was their daily help, arranging everything, silent and invisible. When Assia began to emerge from the state of intoxication in which she had been drowned, made an effort to free her heavy head, and lent an ear to the rustling of the busy shadow that came and went about her house, her pride was roused, perhaps sooner than her gratitude: lovers think it natural that people should serve them on bended knee. She recovered the use of her legs to go and reclaim her household government. Annette, who was sweeping the dining room, saw her come in, barefooted, in her night-dress, wide-eyed, like a little owl just come suddenly out of its barn into the sunshine. Annette laughed, dropped the broom, ran to her and took her in her arms. Assia, quite serious—she had not yet emerged sufficiently to laugh—let herself be kissed like a condescending princess as she sat on Annette's knees. Annette held Assia's chin and gravely studied her face. Pressing her thumb against Assia's cheek, she made her turn her face, to examine her profile. Then she took her daughter's cheeks between her hands and looked deeply into her eyes. At this contact the steely pupils relaxed, the hard-clenched fingers loosened, and the still moist hand caressed Annette's mouth. And Assia said:

"Thank you."

"I don't want thanks," said Annette.

"I don't care what you want. I want to thank you. Thank you!"

"What for?"

"For having made him."

Annette squeezed her.

"Is he well made?"

"Exactly to my measure!"

Their laughing eyes met. They would have brooked no challenge. The two gossips were not afraid to praise God's good things. But Annette said with gay humility:

"We mothers never more than half make them. It is for you to perfect him!"

"I have begun to work at it already."

"Oh! it is not the work of a night. It is a difficult job. You will have to wear your fingers out at it. Have you any patience?"

"Not a penny's worth!"

"Oh, dear! Oh, dear!"

"It will be enough if he has any."

"I can't answer for that."

"Then I'll return him. I have been cheated over the bargain."

"If I were to take you at your word? If I did take him back?"

"Just try!"

She drew back with an air of defiance.

"Peace, peace, my beauty!" said Annette. "There is no danger. You've got him, and you'll stick to him. It is in the order of nature. You have taken my son from me. Someone will take yours from you."

"Oh! it's a long day to that!" said Assia. "I reap my harvest and eat it. Time enough later to bother about the seed."

"Take care the summer does not come too soon!"

"I am not afraid of it. I love fire."

"I have been through it," said Annette.

"I can smell it," said Assia, sniffing at her. "There's a smell of scorching in the corners still."

"The fire is out."

"Do you swear to it? I am going to stir up the ashes!"

"No, no, no, no! . . . I don't want to begin over again. Everyone in his turn. Your turn with the fire! Be sparing of it."

"There is always plenty!"

Annette had her doubts. But it is not prudent to express them. The young know everything best. May the god of fire watch over them! One can do nothing. Fire cannot hear. It has neither ears nor eyes. It has but a tongue, not for speaking, but for darting; it leaves nothing unconsumed. It is famished. It must be fed continuously with fresh fuel. Marc and Assia had more than Annette suspected. Their hearts went on burning for months, after the great bonfire of the beginning. They had taken up their life of daily work again, their eyelids lowered over the flame of desire, but as soon as they raised them, it flared up; their greedy eyes devoured each other like those of the couple in the Farnesina. It seemed as though they would never be satiated . . .

And then, from one day to another the fire went out—And it was dark. . . .

II

The catastrophe did not strike both at once. One after the other. The blow fell first on Assia.

She was getting ready to go out. Marc had just left her. They had browsed upon each other. The blinds of the room were down. Outside, sunshine and the noise of the street. Assia sat upon the bed, empty of thought—weary, rather sad, sickened. The room was stuffy. She pulled up the blinds. The sun came in. She looked at herself in the glass, her arms raised to arrange her hair; the strong light hurt her eyes; she blinked. The brief second that her eyelids were lowered and raised: a plunge . . . When she opened her eyes again she was not in the same country; the two instants succeeding each other were not in sequence: there was a monstrous hiatus between them. The woman with blind eyes, seeking her way, could not find her shadow or her sunlight: she could not find love any more. She turned giddy. She sank down on a stool against the wall. She had not even had strength to lower her hands which were clasped above her head. They weighed upon it, like a capital. She stared before her, stunned. She could see nothing. She thought of nothing. She thought nothingness. Nothing in her heart. Nothing in her mind. A complete void. Not a trace of the past. When she tried to fix it, to cling to it (she was falling from a tower) her blood congealed: everything had become strange to her—that man, that body which had touched her, the memory of her transports, that woman naked and surrendered, that Assia . . . "To love . . . To love . . ." She repeated the two dead words, without understanding them.

Not a thrill, not a feeling corresponded to them. . . . She said to herself:

"I am mad. I know quite well that I did love him! . . ."

But her hallucinated consciousness replied:

"What? . . . What is it? I do not understand . . ."

She spent hours in bewilderment, crouched in her corner, never moving. It was nearly evening. A church clock reminded her that "he" would be coming home. She started up. She washed, did her hair, and composed her face. In the glass she saw emptiness again in the depths of her sad, hard eyes. She drew a veil over it. She could not show it naked. . . . Pity for the other, or fear of herself?

He noticed nothing—lovers are full of themselves—and that blind-eyed selfishness made the arid abyss deeper. The rancor she felt at it tore the veil she had drawn over her eyes; he plunged into them, and, stupefied, found a desert. But the veil was drawn once more. He did not try to draw it aside again. To his questions, she answered:

"Nothing."

He took care not to insist. He was frightened.

At night, he held a lifeless body in his arms, yet the body was alive, and lent itself passively to his wishes—a body emptied of its being: the one he knew, his treasure, was gone. Thank God, he did not see another being hidden in the shadow, watching him with an icy glance. But though he could not see, he felt the coldness of it. In the midst of the embrace, he released the passive body. Though she lay still she seemed to him like a falling stone, slipped from his hands. Face to face, in the bed, they held their breath and pretended to sleep. But

each was spying on the other, with heart and limbs contracted. . . .

"Who is this being facing me?"

Assia, persuading herself that Marc was asleep, took the opportunity to escape; she turned over, very slowly opposing him with the wall of her back. Marc followed all her movements, like those of a stealthy animal creeping away; and he asked himself, in anguish:

"What have I done to her?"

Assia felt his breath on her back, but before her the empty bed and the free night. She fled, as if into the forest. . . . Happily the feigned sleep changed into real slumber: it came down upon them both and stopped the pursuit short. When daylight came they found each other aching but disentangled; they smiled without daring to look at each other too much. Marc had learned to fear Assia; Assia, to be afraid of herself. (That was worse! . . . She was not sure of what might come next. . . .)

Then Marc's turn came. The gulf opened. The next day, in an hour following hours of love in which his thoughts had been wholly engrossed with desire and joy in the beloved, there came upon him a total absence of love: the beloved was nothing but a dead weight. His indifference was so overwhelming that it came almost within an inch of disgust, and was scarcely more than two inches from hatred. The interior revolution seemed all the more terrible that it came about noiselessly, without shock; one became aware of it after it had taken place. Marc looked on, horror-stricken. In his passionate loyalty he accused and condemned himself. But he could not help it. He was brought face to face with the accomplished disaster. It took all his remaining strength to hide the ruins from her. It was not enough. Assia,

warned by her own experience, sensed what had happened. . . .

They went through this in turn. Never both at once. Sometimes it lasted for hours, sometimes for days. It seemed as if repetition tended to prolong the phenomenon: it no longer had the violence of the first blow, but that only made it sadder and more overwhelming. It took the zest out of life. They never had the energy to tell each other of these attacks. They hid them from each other like some shameful disease. And in this silence the disease was becoming chronic; it was installing itself. Annette, the only one who could have instructed them, they kept at arm's length; and she was careful not to interfere in their household: she knew her daughter-in-law's touchy character; she could win her confidence only by not seeking it. Besides, Annette was taken in by them. After foreseeing and expecting the inevitable lowering of temperature that follows high pressure, now that the depression had set in, she did not perceive it, because her children were agreed in hiding it from her. To the eyes of others they never appeared to be such a united couple as on those days when their love was trembling on its base. For they were ashamed to confess what seemed to them an infirmity; an evil without cause!

Yet neither of them was a novice in love; they had both tasted it to satiety. But none of their previous experiences had had the intensity of this one. Until now, there had been no question of real love, but rather young desire that goes a-hunting, rejoicing in the game; nothing unwholesome, but nothing deep, the heedlessness of nature experimenting, and gayly making mistakes: there is plenty of time! Or if, by chance, one got caught in the game, he lost his temper and threw the game over, as Marc did, in vexation, when Sylvie tried to push him

into the trap. But there was no trap here, nor any game. It was a question of the *whole* of life, freely offered and accepted. They had told each other everything and shown everything. They had given all and taken all. They had poured the whole torrent of their life into their love. And that was precisely the reason (but they could not understand it) that having poured everything out, they had nothing left: not a drop! When love was at the ebb, the torrent of life had run dry. They were perishing, stranded.

It was not till much later that they reached the wisdom which understands and pities, which mutually excuses, and reserves for each one a refuge in which to await the end of the reflux, and the coming of the next tide. The rhythm of life has its oscillations, all the wider when life is prodigally expended. Every retreat is succeeded by an advance—unless the violence of repeated shocks should strain the bow-string, and the spring of the heart be warped.

The bow was good; but the archers had lost confidence. Even when the fountain of life flowed again, they could not forget the periods of drought, and how they had then regarded each other.

They were no blindfold lovers, afraid to look at each other. At every moment of their love they had seen each other as they were, unveiled, naked, with their weaknesses, blemishes, and vices (everybody has some, even the best and most beautiful). Both had sharp eyes and gloried in seeing and showing all. When the dead periods of the heart came on, they could discover nothing unfamiliar in the companion. But it was the way of seeing that counted! When they loved each other, they loved even these defects—perhaps, secretly, better than the good qualities; the beloved appeared nearer, more help-

less, more touching. But when love was in eclipse, what a change in shadow and relief! The same lines grew deformed, the grotesque and the odious became apparent: what misery! How had they managed to love—to endure? . . . To endure what they would have to see and have beside them for a whole lifetime! In vain, when the eclipse was over, did they reassure themselves by surveying in broad daylight the places they knew and loved; they could never forget what they had seen, and Assia's disquieting glance persisted in scrutinizing the face and movements of her lover, who felt that he was being watched, and watched her in his turn. Afterwards, they would fall into each other's arms, loving each other all the more because of it, with a kind of concentrated fury: fury against self, fear of losing the other, pardon! pardon! . . .

But the wave receded and advanced, ebbed, and flowed again. . . . They knew that they could never stop it. They had lost their security.

Of course! . . . Nothing can be built on love. They knew it; or ought to have known it: life is a work-yard where work is never at a standstill; there is no room for idlers! The right to love, so be it! But like the right to bread, it must be paid for by work: he who does not work has no right to eat: no more of love than of bread. The iron law. If parasitic vermin still succeed in escaping it, they find their own punishment therein. The stolen bread sticks in their throats. They die of nausea upon their pleasure. No! one does not live by bread and love alone. . . . One must work and create!

III

Even had they wished it, Marc and Assia had not the means to live in idleness, lip to lip, bewailing the ups and downs of love's thermometer. Both had to earn their living. Marc was employed by a firm for the sale and installation of radios. Assia did Russian translations for a publishing house. She also translated and typed commercial correspondence for an export firm. They met only at meals and often fairly late in the evening. But work does not extinguish *"the other thought."* It accumulates in an airless cell, where it ferments. . . . *"The other thought,"* the inextinguishable aspiration of the caravan, journeying across the dreary burning sand, towards the fountain, in the starry night.

"O night! O spring! . . . Must I find you tepid, tasteless and troubled! My thirst increases, unassuaged. . . ."

Every night they took each other with a thrill of anticipation and a more devouring need. They loosed each other, unsatisfied—they dared not own it—disappointed. But Marc persisted in the pursuit, and the more she escaped him, was the more determined to possess the beloved—that there might be left no corner of her territory or mind where he might not enter. She resisted, becoming conscious again, with proud bitterness, of love's limits in herself.

"I open my door to you, of my own will. Come in! But only so far. You shall go no further."

She re-discovered, beyond the doors of her heart, illimitable spaces, where none had right of entry: she had

not explored them herself; they were lost in the distance: *the soul* . . .

"My body, and my heart are yours. . . . But *'the soul,'* no! *The soul* is mine. . . . Is it mine? Or does it own me? . . ."

And the soul was precisely what he wanted!

And she did not believe in that *"soul"!* Like a good post-1917 Russian fed on the materialistic broth, according to the official formula, she had cut off her soul with her hair. She no longer made use of that empty word. She said: "Me, my needs, my rights." And who reminded her of that old-fashioned word, that obsolete song?

It was Annette. She had at last discovered the widening breach between her two children, which they were trying to conceal. But they were too passionate to be skillful. Their looks showed what they were hiding. Knitted brows, nerves on edge, they faced each other defiantly, like two young animals who refuse and yet want each other:

"You are mine!"

"I am my own . . ."

But if she who refused had been taken at her word, she would have thrown herself upon the other, crying:

"Take me!"

Ah! how well Annette knew those combats! She remembered the tears of Roger in the woods, and the distant barking of the dog in pursuit of game.[1] She understood and pitied her boy; and secretly she whispered:

"Courage!"

One day when Assia, alone with her, a storm brewing within, persisted in an angry silence (she was convinced

[1] "Annette and Sylvie."

that Annette would not understand her, or if she did, would think her in the wrong), Annette, who did not seem to be looking at her, and was smiling at a baby's cap, which she was making in secret, pursed her lips and hummed under her breath:

"El corazón te daré
También te daré la vida
Y el alma no te la doy
Porque esa prenda no es mía."

Assia pricked up her ears. She had the facility of the Slav. She seized the meaning of some of the words:

"What is that?"

"Did you understand it?"

"What is that?"

"Our battle song."

Assia laid her hands on Annette's.

"Our song? *Mine!*"

"Well, repeat it in French!"

Assia translated haltingly, corrected by Annette:

"I give you my heart—I give you my life— But I will not give you my soul—for that treasure is not mine."

She stopped, startled, and asked:

"Who said that?"

"*Una niña bonita*, like you and me. . . . Would you like some more?"

She continued:

"Una niña bonita
Se asomó a su balcón. . . ."

"A pretty maid—leaned over her balcony—She asked for my soul: I gave her my heart—She demanded my soul—so I bade her good-by."

Assia, speechless, swallowed hard, and dug her nails into Annette's hand. Annette bent over her and kissed her hair.

"Do not bid him good-by!" she murmured.

Assia, irritated, drew back.

"How do you know? What do you know?"

"I suckled him. I know how greedy my boy is!"

"I should hope so!" said Assia. "If he was not hungry for me, I would have none of him."

"But if he is hungry for more than your milk?"

"*I give my life . . .*" said Assia, repeating the Spanish song.

"*But I do not give my soul . . .*" continued Annette.

"Am I wrong?"

"No, you are right."

Assia fell upon Annette and seized her arms.

"I am right? You say so?"

"I do."

Assia embraced her impetuously.

"Take care! You'll prick yourself," said Annette, putting her needle and work aside. Then she said gently:

"But just because you are right, you must be indulgent to my boy. He does not know. None of them know, poor boys! It is for us who do know, to understand them, and love them as they are."

"I do love him just as he is! If he were different, I would not love him."

"Then why do you torment both him and yourself?"

"Because he torments me."

"He is a child. He is your child. The man who loves us is our child. We must fondle him and give him suck, and if he bites us, the puppy, it is to cut his teeth on us. He is a good dog."

Assia passed her hands over Annette's arms.

"What are you looking for?"

"The teeth marks."

Annette withdrew her arms.

"How indiscreet!"

"Tell me!"

"Tell you? What about?"

"One of your affairs with your dogs."

Annette repeated the end of the *copla:*

> *"Y el alma no te la doy*
> *Porque esa prenda no es mía."*

"Then one cannot share it with anyone? The soul must be kept for oneself alone?"

"No, not for yourself!"

"For whom then?"

"For itself."

"I don't understand," said Assia.

"Neither do I," said Annette, "but it is true."

Assia slipped to the floor, and mused, her cheek resting against Annette's knee. Then she said:

"Yes, it's true. . . . But it isn't reassuring. This stranger who dwells in me and commands me, this thought that invades and escapes me . . . who is it we harbor?"

"You must not be frightened of it. Everybody harbors the same. All the tenants are not comely. One cannot help it. It takes all kinds to make a world. The whole question is to be a world, that is to know how to organize it. You don't know yet. You'll learn."

"I shall learn what? Not to let thought pass into action? But there is only a line between them. And for oneself, when one is honest, a thought is as good as an act. A woman who thinks of a lover, in her husband's bed, knows very well that she is as false to him as in the lover's bed."

Annette's ironical good sense called a halt in time:

"That's understood, my child. He is a cuckold. A thought is enough. But at least, let it prevent the action. There is only a line between, as you say. But to the husband, to other people, if not to ourselves—the line is very important. . . . Spare my Marc, I beg of you. Don't cross the line!"

Assia, who was very capable of appreciating irony, laughed heartily:

"No question of that! I love my Marc both within and beyond the line."

"Perhaps you will not always love him within the line."

"Why not?"

"You have said it. Our thought escapes us over and over again. Don't follow it! It will come back . . . And while you wait for it, my big daughter, it is useless to let your companion know that your thought has crossed the bridge."

"Lie to him, I? No, never!"

"It is not lying to spare him useless torment. Fight your battles alone! You can tell him the result afterwards."

"Then I should keep my serpents to myself?"

"Devour them! Every woman must eat them, alone. Or, if you have too many, I am here. Invite me to your meal!"

"One never knows if you are speaking seriously."

"Seriously, yes. Tragically, no. Nature is what it is. There's no use in protesting. One must know, and do one's best to steer it. If one can't and the boat is swept away, there's nothing left but—to pray—or to laugh—according to taste."

"Laugh?"

"Why not? It's our last victory."

"Daughter of the Vikings!"

"Very possibly! When I was young, Sylvie used to tell me that I was a Normandy heifer. I remember browsing in fair meadows on leaving the ship that brought the fair-haired warriors of the North."

"Browse; pray, none of that for me! I am ready to laugh, but at the enemy's expense, while fighting. Not accepting!"

"Accept or not! What does he care for the permission?"

"Who?"

"He who is coming."

In her effort to rise, so as to look into Annette's face, Assia's fingers touched the work which Annette had dropped; she turned it about mechanically, then in surprise:

"Why, what are you making? A cap?"

She examined it.

"Who for?"

"For him who is coming," said Annette.

"Who told you? Marc swore he would not tell."

Annette stroked her cheek with her hand that hung down.

"Nobody told me. But I thought that he was on the way. So I am getting ready. The little greyhound must have long legs. You two grown-ups, you have run enough!"

Assia laughed, and rubbed her face against the hand that caressed her.

"He runs! I feel his little legs in my womb. . . . He runs, and he will run. . . . Ah! My God! And I, am I to be chained up? I won't be; I am not made for the kennel."

"What are you afraid of?" said Annette. "Since you do not hold your soul yourself, who is there to put it on the chain?"

IV

But Annette herself could only guide her children half the way. After that she knew no more than they did. She had lost her bearings. Though they did not tell each other, she participated in the same crisis of thought as theirs; just because their natures were akin, and each of them was going his own way, by different tracks of the same road, they all came to the same deadlock.

The unformulated religion of Annette's whole life was her high individualism. She had fed upon that flame which, purer in her than in most, was still the aliment she had in common with the foremost of her generation—especially the strongest and freest—with all those whom she had chosen or accepted, as lovers, friends, or allies. To them, as to her, the irremediable blemish and sin seemed any alienation, however slight, of the free ego. Anything rather than renounce that! Material poverty and solitude . . . That was little enough still. She was even inclined to fall into the opposite excess. More than once, she had found herself attracted (she did not like to admit it) to the asocial, the *condottiere.* Hence her sudden impulses, her conjunctions, inexplicable, in the eyes of the worthy folk who knew her, with a Philippe Villard, and a Timon. These good folk would have been greatly surprised—she too, perhaps—if her conscience, her real conscience, that which took no account of morality, had said: "I am more akin to them than to you." Better be a wolf than a sheep! Better anything, than a sheep! The obscure incoercible horror for the flock!

She had instilled it into Marc with her blood. And, perhaps, it was not the best legacy she had given him.

In any case, it did not make life easier for him. Marc had never been able to attach himself to any school of thought. Even as his mother would never consent to shut herself up in any marriage bed, he refused to imprison his mind between the sheets of any doctrine. He could not understand the masochism of the majority who persisted like La Balue in padlocking themselves with backs bent and deformed in cages! What had he to do with all the quarrels between the "*isms*"—materialism, spiritualism, socialism, communism, etc., etc.! They are all collars of dogs on the chain.

And Assia likewise fled from the chain, fled from constricting walls, fled from the channel, the course marked out, fled and fled from everything that could bind, so much so that in trying too hard to safeguard her ego, she ended by losing it, like a stream that overflows, and goes astray in the fields. By sheer flowing it loses its course and current. Beware, lest it end as a shoreless Maremma stagnating in the sun! . . . And ware to Marc! This little queen of fever, this stream without a bed, what business had she in his bed?

She had tried, and he had tried, to realize between them isolation for two, a double-headed individualism, like Janus. It is the instinct of life. The ego, the ego! It is always hungry. It must be fed. . . . "Feed it on you. I want to be you. Be you? Have you? . . . The two heads of Janus are not set back to back, but mouth to mouth: the two suckers. Which will devour the other? The orange is either hard and bitter; it resists: or it is soft, and is sucked dry; and then what is left to quench my thirst? The skin? I throw it away. . . . It is not long before I find my solitude and thirst once more."

And it was not long before Marc and Assia had this double taste of bitterness and dryness on their tongues,

the boredom, arising in healthy and sincere beings, from the consciousness (franker in Assia, more repressed in Marc) of the social uselessness of their lives.

Annette saw her son growing gloomy when he came to see her—not very often: for he felt awkward with her, and feared her too close scrutiny, although he tried to persuade himself that she could not see through him; he still had the masculine tendency to attribute disdainfully to women a congenital incapability of getting away from themselves, a dim shortsightedness like somnambulists going about enveloped in the warm smoke of their dreams. When he came and sat in silence, or talked of nothing in particular, Annette saw the precocious lines developing on his worried forehead. And she listened absently. The thoughts of both did not listen to their words, but followed their own train. Once Annette sighed involuntarily. Marc asked:

"What's the matter, mother?"

"I am rather tired. It's nothing."

"When will you be able to rest a little?"

"When my children are happy."

"They are," said Marc.

Annette smiled, and looked into his eyes. Marc's first movement was to turn his away. Then he was annoyed at his weakness, and his eyes sustained his mother's glance. He seemed to challenge her. Annette laid both her hands on his arm and she felt his muscles stiffen. She laughed and said:

"Do you want to wrestle?"

Glad of this pretext to distract her thoughts, he disengaged his arms and grasped his mother's, squeezing them affectionately, as in the game of *petit loup*. She cried out. It hurt her. It did her good. She surrendered and said:

"Strong, my boy! A good grip!"

He loosed her:

"Oh! did I hurt you?"

"It's nothing. . . . What a good grip like a vise I've given him. . . . He is well armed. . . . But to be well armed and strong is no use! . . . One must know the adversary. Do you know him?"

She was no longer speaking of herself. He did not understand. Their foreheads were almost touching. She knocked hers against his, gently, and repeated:

"Do you know him, my strong wrestler? Do you know the adversary well?"

"Who?" he asked. "You?"

"Me, or her. She who loves you best, and whom you love. . . . Are you quite ready?"

He was puzzled. He confessed:

"I don't understand."

He was beginning to feel uneasy.

She drew herself up, took his forehead between her hands so that he could not escape, and, holding him before her eyes, she changed tone. No joking now! Never raising her voice, but inflexible . . . ("I am not sparing you any longer . . .")

"Be ready! . . . She whom you love, she who loves you most, the time will come when she will hate you, and you will hate her. Hatred is but little! Nausea . . . Your mere presence will be repulsive to her. She will hide it from you and from herself. . . . And it will last, it may last, for minutes, or for days. . . . It will follow the most ardent impulses of love, and they may succeed it. Or else it may install itself in the house, noiselessly, under the placidity of daily life, for a longer or shorter period, without altering the tacit understanding renewed from day to day. But the evil will be there in the beloved heart. And your own heart will not

escape it. In your own moments, or days, you will feel the same impulses, the same torments. The worst of it is that your hours will not be her hours: the rising of the soul in revolt hardly ever marks the same hour on both dials. Perhaps it will be the evening when you approach her with the most fervent love that her heart will spew you out. And it will be the night when her body clings most madly to yours that your furious soul will whisper to her: 'Go away.' But you will not say it. And she will not say it. For you will both be ashamed of yourselves and full of pity for the other. . . . Shame and pity. . . . That's good. It is the first step. Thanks to that step your pain will not be altogether wasted. Most people, if they are but possessed of a little humanity, reach that stage, and stay there. But you, my Marc, you must go a step further. You must learn to look the adversary in the face, as you are looking at me now—don't move—and say: 'You are like that. I love you as you are. I love you, you who reject me, you who hate me against your will. Forgive me! It is the wild law of revolt. It is as sacred as that of love. And perhaps I should love you less if you were incapable of hearing it. . . .' "

She stopped speaking, but she continued to press his forehead and she felt his temple beating under her thumb. He had held his breath. Then they drew away from each other. And they avoided each other's eyes.

Marc in a smothered voice said under his breath:

"I am afraid . . . I am not ready . . ."

Annette replied:

"My poor boy. . . . Neither am I! I never was till after the battle. . . . But it is something to have provided oneself with a reserve force. . . . I give you mine."

Marc said in the same tone:

"I am almost as frightened of it as of the adversary."

Annette laughed:

"My dear boy! . . . I beg your pardon . . ."

Marc got up to go. As he was going out, he turned back:

"Mother! . . . And you can love life? . . . Why, it's a monster!"

"There are some beautiful monsters," said Annette.

Marc said, jokingly:

"You're one of them."

"I am of that race. I am not ashamed of it. Try not to be ashamed of mine."

"If I were only sure that I would never make you ashamed of me!"

"What of, indeed? Since you sprung from me, everything that comes from you goes to my account. I do not dispute my signature. I endorse everything, both the present and the future."

"Even to the filth?"

"Must have manure!" said Annette jovially.

"I have a cynical mother," said Marc, playing the young saint. . . . "And she quotes Labiche into the bargain!"

"I would rather quote Rabelais. But I spare your feelings, my little Miss!"

"Come, come!" exclaimed Marc, with vexation. "Do you suppose I am afraid of words, or things?"

"Well! You turn squeamish before life!"

"I am disgusted at myself. I have a perfect right to be!"

"No! you have not. . . . Dig up your field! Everything should serve to manure it. Dung, and even worms and locusts. Dig your spade in, like the naked man on

Lemerre's old books! Dig your field! . . . And don't forget Assia's either!"

"Upon that score, honest lady," said Marc, "I am in no need of lessons."

Mother and son laughed in each other's faces.

Marc thought, as he went downstairs:

"If only Assia were like that!"

V

Assia was not so different from Annette! Less so than Marc. All women—white, black, yellow, or green—have points in common. If they do not seem to see them, it is because, half the time, they are rivals, they steal men from each other (even though they do not love them: it is an instinct which the best of them resist, but which the best of them are aware of). From the first, Assia had realized better than Marc the hold that Annette had upon him. And, naturally, the first task was to take him from her. However much they felt themselves allies, and even loved each other sincerely, the instinct of each said:

"This man is mine."

The only difference was that Annette lightly thrust this instinct aside, when she was conscious of it, whereas Assia's consciousness only came into play to add to it an increase of imperious selfishness which would brook no sharing. And that is why in the love crisis which she and Marc were going through, Annette's clear-sightedness was not of much help. . . . Besides, when she so bluntly revealed to her son the dangers of the feminine heart, to what extent, herself unconscious, did a grain of treason enter into it? Assia would have thought so. The woman who betrays to man the secrets of woman in love is a traitor to her country. . . . And every woman is, when her turn comes. But none of them ever forgives the other . . .

The estrangement of the young couple had begun: yet Assia would not have ceded an inch of the ground conquered from Annette. On the contrary, she seemed more

set on keeping possession of the enclosure, the more the wind of doubt blew within her:

"Why did I come and cage myself up between these walls?"

The child growing in her womb was also part of the conquest. The innocent! . . . (Was she less so? Both were blind. . . .) He was the flag of the conqueror. And the man who planted him never guesses that he is the flag-stick: he is caught.

Yes, but Assia discovered too late that she was caught too. She had run her head into the same halter. And who held them? The little body issued from her body, which riveted Marc in chains to her, it chained her likewise, it riveted them both to the outside world, the anonymous, the unseen master whom they dreaded and refused to accept—to the social body with its overwhelming mass of servitudes. They could not escape the errors and punishments which awaited society; they were bound, bound by their offshoot to that inextricable polyp of roots and radicles, to the fatalities of that blind growth and its sap. They could no longer observe it from without in disdainful detachment. They had gone and thrown themselves into the net.

Caught in her own trap, the *"niña"!* One does not own to it. But she felt herself throttled as by a rope round her neck. . . . And he was the strangler, he, the newborn babe with his tiny, wrinkled hands! Bending over him, Assia watched him with troubled rancorous eyes. She was completely at a loss.

Yet it was not the first time she had been a mother. . . . Yes, there was that terrible memory that she beat back, that little victim, that blood-stained fruit. . . . She had thrust him into oblivion, sunk him in the depths of the water. . . . She was obliged to! . . . If she had not

she would have gone into convulsions. . . . But was she sure that he would not come to the surface again—that he had not returned? . . . And if he were the newcomer, he who was just waking up, there, in her bed? . . . These mad flashes sometimes suddenly transpierce a woman's hallucinated brain. It would be useless to reason about them. She did not try. All she could do was to try not to think of them, let them pass, pretend that she did not know. To resist would be to face them. . . . Her blood ran cold at the idea. . . . She turned over, her face buried in the pillow:

"I have seen nothing. I know nothing."

But a moment later she was again studying the infant with sidelong glances. . . . All Assia's life was made up of these repressions and explosions in the caverns of being, which were hidden by the rainbow clouds of the perpetual movement of daily life, the only life one is permitted to see.

And so she was in an attitude of defense towards this stranger—the child. Almost more of fear (hostility even, at brief moments) than of love. The maternal instinct was little developed in her, and the first catastrophe, in obscure self-defense, had strangled it: she could not have lived with that dreadful gaping wound; the will to live had stitched it up clumsily, and the secret beating of stifled maternity was otherwise interpreted, with the complicity of conscience: its call, as with so many women, had been turned aside towards the lover. She had thought little about the child beforehand; when she thought of it, she thought of the man. She had his seed. He was in her. He was hers. . . . It was herself she thought of. She was the couple, she was all. . . . And now! . . . She was nothing at all. . . . He had come, he who was everything. . . . That little worm! . . . And after the

struggle of childbirth, she found herself in the background, a simple soldier, returned to the ranks. . . . As to Marc, say no more about him! He was relegated to the baggage wagons.

And who was he, this new master? Whence had he come? From the darkness, from death, from those skirmishes in the Ukraine, where the other little body had vanished? And whither was he going? Where was he leading her? Towards what other conflicts? This master slave in his turn, this link in the chain that bound her to a sum of fatalities past, present, and to come, to that enslaving society, whose yoke she thought she had broken! . . .

She gazed at him with stupefaction, with terror, with repulsion, with hatred—and, suddenly, with torrents of love. . . . They swept away all the flood gates. The extraordinary passion of these impulses filled Assia's sky like thunderstorms, and like thunderstorms passed away leaving a confusion of seasons in the atmosphere. Assia had unexpected weeks of blind, exclusive, animal passion for the child. Nothing else counted then. Marc was the spider's mate. If she devours him it is because he is in the way: he has played his part! Marc had the good sense to efface himself. He made no claim to her sucking worm. Like many men, especially when young, he felt disgust for the fruit of the beloved womb. The child only begins to interest them a year after he has been washed clean . . . Of what? His impurities? You have a fine right to mention them! . . . From the obscure gulf of the Formless? . . . They need to recognize in him the lineaments and limitations: man.

And it was from the moment she perceived them that Assia's torrent of passion abated. He was no longer the mysterious master questioned by her hallucinated expectation. He was a very ordinary little man, with nothing of him she had lost, and almost nothing of herself; he was like the French babies she saw every day, without interest, exposed in the pale sunlight of the Luxembourg by the working-women ants, babies who were not of the fabric of her dreams. What treason! . . . And he was healthy, normal, and exacting; he did not suffer himself to be forgotten. It was by his voracity that he still held Assia firmly, by the breast. It gave her an animal pleasure to feel the greedy mouth draining her bosom. Yes, he held her, he had good hold on her! And secretly she bore him a grudge for it; she thought:

"When and how can I escape?"

She oscillated between rancor and love. And her most overwhelming discovery was that now she could be neither entirely free nor entirely captive. . . . If she could only have been entirely captive! Assia's entire nature (entire and changing with the succession of moments, but quite entire at every moment) found nothing more unbearable than Yes and No at once. . . . Nothingness! . . . Better the worst! She tried sincerely to give herself entirely to the child. . . . Impossible! One has to delude oneself like those mothers who imagine that they have laid the Easter egg, and to whom their featherless duckling is the miracle of miracles. Assia weighed the gosling on her palm, and thought:

"One mediocrity more in the world. . . . Sacrifice my liberty to it? No, that's asking too much!"

And what was that liberty worth? . . . What could she do with it? How occupy it? . . . Assia was too honest to deceive herself about him, or herself. If she had been born eager and imperious, she did not try to persuade herself that a superiority of nature assured privileged treatment to herself and her offspring. No! She

was more inclined to convince herself without mercy of her own mediocrity. Mediocre in mind, mediocre in heart, or rather less than mediocre; mediocre in body: call it ugly.

"But what do I care? Does it prevent me from being hungry? I'm hungry as he is; he, this leech—he is hungry for my breast. And I seek like a blind puppy for the teat to bite on the breasts of nature. Where is it hidden? I must have it, and I seek it with my nose and my four feet. If I have taken this man with me, it is that he may help me to find it, to make the milk spurt from the breast —a fig for insipid milk—the blood that wells up from the heart of life."

VI

The man was a poor help. He was a blind dog, like herself; he chewed vainly at the tip of a withered teat, worn-out, almost completely dried up, on the old body of Mother Europe. . . . He floundered in the desert of individualism.

How is it? It was once a great, shady, fertile, well-watered valley. Even yesterday, when everything was burning, amidst the ruins of war, it was an oasis to the free spirit; there it found still its cool spring and pure nights under the palm trees. Now the spring is befouled and trampled, the circle of palm trees is broken; the sand whistles through the broken screen; the sky is white and the air burns: the desert has devoured all. . . .

Let us speak plainly! It is doing the cowards too much honor to paint up their capitulation with imagery. For it is nothing less. Individualism, the free spirit, since the other war, has had its army of Metz and its Sedan. It has surrendered. What is left of it? A few shreds of flags, hidden in pockets, which are exhibited at private gatherings; or in safe palavers. Who is he who dares hold out against the State and its dogs: opinion and the press? They call themselves free in their overlooked garden; they cultivate it, and gargle their throats with noble verses, like that Horace, the crouching dog who, on the chain, yapped proudly for posterity. He, at least, had the cynicism to boast that he had thrown away his shield. But these would have it believed that they are independent, while they are being fed. Between these proud intellectuals and the master (the master changes but the servants do not change) a contract has been tacitly

established like that which governs domestic animals. All liberty in your employment and on my farm! But do not go outside it! Upon these terms I will fatten you. . . . They have so acquired the habit that they do not even try to get out. When the master lets them loose, he does not worry: they have their collars on. The few who take them off, secretly, because they still feel a grain of shame, parade their necks in vain—the hair is gone. Marc blushed to see masters whom he had esteemed, elders upon whom he had relied, pitifully trying to hide under a boast of free choice the conformity of thought to which they had made their submission by calculation or fear. Such an example demoralized the younger men and taught them early to prostitute their brains: they sold themselves to the highest bidder; but after the fashion of high-class prostitutes, they managed to make it appear that it was for love of the master of the day, who was keeping them. As soon as an idea—red or black, war or peace—became official or was on the verge of becoming so, they rushed to serve it—into its posts. If it wavered, they wavered, sniffing which way the wind blew. But if, by ill-luck, it died suddenly they did not dally over its obsequies. They were already acclaiming the living king.

This is of all times. But what is of ours, is that our people, our men, our good, the intellectuals and all their Blessed Sacraments of democratic ideologies, have taken to the rôle of courtesans. When it was a degenerate aristocracy that prostituted itself, we had but to let it alone to dig its own grave! The fields above it would grow thicker crops. But now it is my fields that are rotting: it is my light-words, my source-words from which the great individualism drew sustenance. Independence of Spirit. . . . Where has it gone, that independence? At

the best it is playing constitutional opposition to a government which it spares because it intends to make sure of the succession, and endorses in advance the losses and charges of the inheritance. They have become so expert at swimming in a compromise of thought that, sometimes, the reds cannot be distinguished from the blacks, nor the right hand from the left: everything is mixed, and parties in Parliament, and outside it, are more or less amphibious.

"I even prefer the *arrabiati* of reaction: they are as open as the knife-blade with which they will stick me in the ribs some day. But these post-war Socialists, with their Judas kisses, would betray the Revolution and try to hamstring it, since it hinders them in their own reforms, which they would achieve without haste or damage! . . . These tenants of the State take good care not to upset the house which they count upon letting some day to their own advantage. . . . And what have I to do with these investments of heads of families, and leases of prejudices and interests! If only I could find, in the West, a score of free men resolved, at all costs, to seek and serve truth, wherever they may find it! Though it should be against their country, or against their caste. Or even against themselves! Truth is the country of the free man. . . . But all those I see around me have no country. They are voluntary serfs. They cheat their master, who lets them do it, because he holds them. And these young intellectuals and the sharks keep shop together in ideologies and business. Yesterday, war, the nation, Latin civilization. To-day it is the peace of Europe, and of course liberty, which is the commodity of exchange (the stock is quoted on the Bourse; it is going down, it can be bought to-day for almost nothing)! He who would be free must have money. And he who would have money must sell his liberty. Strife of conscience?

Not at all! The conscience of to-day is too soft-hearted to risk its health like that: it proves to itself mathematically that if it is free, it has the obvious right to sell itself —enough that it desires the price one pays. And it does. You have only to mention a subject. Conscience will supply you with arguments at once. It is only a matter of making them eloquent. Be it gold, or places, or parts to play; power . . . He said well who said: 'To will, is to have power. . . .' To want power. They all want it. Every man his share. And for what purpose? When they are in, to stay in. That is not the time when they can be expected to disentangle themselves from the network of compromises in which they have wound themselves in order to rise. They will remain caught in it for ever, like flies in the web. And who, and where is the spider? It is gorged, and keeps watch on its larder. The fat flies go on buzzing. They try to persuade themselves that they are free. They are not. They get stuck faster with every movement of their wings."

Annette saw this in the case of her bumble-bee, her Timon. In vain did he buzz and spread fear around him. He could not escape. And he knew it! Annette was witness of his furies. All he could do was to wind himself closer in the web, and with it he rolled round his back thousands of enmeshed insects. But these only made a thicker and more stifling shroud for his own limbs. He was caught. They are all caught, the great catchers, the business kings, steel, petrol, matches, armaments. They are stuck in the sticky meshes of the same web: when one thread vibrates, they feel it in their entrails, they are interdependent; and all are hung up together on the butcher's stall of the Spider . . . the blind beast that has cast its drag-net over the river of life. Economic fatalism

governs the orbit of human society, and tows Spirit behind it . . .

But Marc protested. He would not consent to sign the capitulation. He was resolved to maintain Spirit free in himself. He called to witness his two allies, two heads hard and obstinate in independence, Annette and Assia. Annette said:

"Hold out!"

But Assia, smiling ironically, said:

"What good is your free spirit to you?"

His heart shrank. He protested violently. But the blow had gone straight home.

Sterility of the individual. . . . He tries to deceive himself, in vain.

"I am a world. If I save myself, does it go for nothing?"

She answered:

"A world entirely self-centered, a red star dying out, gives out no heat."

He said:

"Assia! Not even you left?"

She took pity, but it was impossible for her to disguise the truth.

"Yes, my boy. I warm my finger-tips at it."

Such pity was worse than if she had said outright:

"My heart is cold."

He tried to show fight:

"But haven't you got your own hearth, your fire within?"

"I need fuel for it."

"But your little fawn? . . ." (He hesitated to add: "and your Marc?" . . .)

She laughed:

"My little fawn, and my big deer. . . ."

He replied, humbly:

"Are they not enough fuel for you?"

She stroked his face, and he kissed her hand in passing.

"Of course, of course, they make a nice little chafing-pan for me . . ."

"Is that all?"

"It's a good deal. But, forgive me, I would like to exercise my feet on the ground. Hot or cold, what does it matter? I want to get my feet warm—walking, running, and acting."

"Well, can't we act together?"

"Yes, but how? What can you do?"

He knew his powerlessness too well, but he tried to protest:

"We can do anything. We are free."

She smiled her extinguishing smile:

"Free to walk round the enclosure. Don't talk nonsense! You know quite well that liberty is parked in concentration camps. No exit! They might just as well strangle it. But they are kind masters! They need only let the race die out. The last of the free—free for what? They will keep them on view in cages in the Jardin des Plantes. You'll be there."

"And you, Assia?"

"Not I. I don't know how yet. But free or not, I'll get out."

"Free or not? You would renounce liberty to get out?"

"Liberty is outside. Give it any name you like! I leave you the word. I want the thing."

She was the franker of the two. He had always jealously refused to enroll himself in any of the parties disputing the field of battle, or haggling with each other over settlements behind the barrier. He wanted to keep

his liberty. Well, let him keep it! Nobody was trying to take it from him. What good was it? It did not provide him with food. He now spent his days in a publisher's office; his knowledge of three or four languages had procured him a rather important post in the business correspondence department; but he had nothing to do with the literary side: precisely because he was known to have a personality of his own they took good care not to trust him with the reading of manuscripts, and if he had found time to write a book, it would have had no chance of publication with his own firm. From time to time he wrote articles under a pseudonym in one of the two or three papers which still keep up, at little cost, the ancient reputation of independence, liberty of the press, and other twaddle. . . . There are only a few duffers of readers left to believe in them. Those who can read know better. It is an unspeakable hotch-potch of compromise. The master of to-day and he of to-morrow are both courted (moreover the two enemies are cronies, or fire at each other's backs); peace is vaunted on the first page, armaments on the second, and the leading tenors of the troupe sing holy democracy and the sacred rights of humanity, while the directors pocket bribes, to hold their tongues, or to silence the ingenuous editors, who have taken the idealistic stunt seriously, upon the crimes and dividends of colonization. One day or another, some unlucky indiscretion reveals these great hearts, these knights of Immortal Principles, involved in some sordid piece of trickery of a company for business or adventure; they are exposed by the rival band. Much ado about nothing! They have only to retaliate with the threat of another scandal against the other band of robbers. Both shout themselves hoarse crying: "Justice! justice!" for a week or two, then all is silence; they have

made a compact: "I thieve to the right, you thieve to the left, let's say no more about it. Closed mouths and full pockets!" They are not full, the pockets of the honest fools of editors, the few worthy souls of no character who have undertaken to play the part of idealists quite naturally in the gang, in order to rope in subscribers. They tell no lies, they are the hook of the marauder who fishes in troubled waters, and they endeavor to forget this humiliating office. What else can they do? They must live. And where else could they write? They persuade themselves that they are fulfilling a sacerdotal office. Their slave driver is clever enough to let them row "freely"—well chained to their bench! He knows very well that they are not dangerous and that the asthmatic strokes of their oars will not make the boat deviate an inch from her course. It is the boat that carries them along, them and their claptrap of idealisms, like Tritons carved on the poop, while at the prow, beneath the foam, the jaws of the shark operate. What have these "idealists" got to complain of? Full liberty to pour forth their virtuous homilies! So long as they apply to everything in general, and to nothing and to nobody in particular, all is well, it is part of the parade. Rare, very rare, are the ill-conditioned spirits, like Marc, who refuse the rôle of drummer. He has not the good taste, or—if not for his own sake, let it be for the sake of others—the charity to keep over his eyes the complaisant bandage which allows his companions to be dupes. If they are not, must they then be accomplices? It is a cruel test to inflict on worthy men whose hay is in the stall. If they renounce it, where will they eat? They are past their first youth, and the other stalls are occupied.

It is only the rich who can hope, without coming under any yoke, to speak their minds freely upon subjects which

closely affect the interests of the day. And naturally, the rich have something better to do than to undermine the ground under their own feet by revealing how their wealth was acquired. Then there are those intellectual phœnixes who being well aware of the impossibility or dangers of liberty in action, play the braggart with it and affect to despise it: a fig for the spirit that is enslaved by the realities of social and political life! There is no freedom of spirit for these heroes, except the sterile "*faith without action*"—unless it be in that empyrean of Ideas in which the clockwork runs down in the manufacturer's shop, with the doors closed to the risks and jolts of life. Certainly they are free of life, for they are dead. Benda, the crouching "clerk," watches over the whitening bones in the valley of Josaphat. He watches that the Angel shall not wake them. . . .

Could Marc's appetite be satisfied with such funereal liberty? He spat it out with horror. There is no spirit, there is no life, but for those who act! But where are they, the real living? And how can they manage to stand erect under the standard beneath which all heads are bent to-day?—Break the standard! Make a hole in the ceiling! You cannot do it alone. It is your skull that would be cracked. You must unite with other rebels. But to unite is to be bound. It is to accept the discipline of parties and the doctrines with which the parties are larded. Marc refused. Assia, whose approval he sought, shrugged her shoulders and said drily:

"Who wills the end, wills the means."

He protested:

"Assia! *You* to talk of putting on bonds!"

She smiled her bad smile.

"I put them on to-day. I cast them off to-morrow."

He did not laugh.

"Ours too? Those between you and me?"

She defied him. "And why not? If you are free you must be free to bind and unbind yourself. I am."

"Assia! Don't joke about such things!"

She saw his anxious expression. She smiled (the good smile this time!). And she kissed him.

"Little boy!"

He clung to her neck, relieved but a little piqued.

"I am your man."

"No. Not quite."

"Well! What do you want?"

"I want a *man*. You, if you can be one. Be one! . . . Or look out!"

She was joking. But there was always a serious background to Assia's jokes. Marc knew it. He was disturbed. He asked:

"Tell me what I ought to do."

"Ah! no," she said. "That's your business. Your part as a man."

"But what if you dislike it afterwards?"

"Like or dislike, I'll tell you afterwards. Not before! You are the man. Act first!"

This refusal to speak or discuss, the suspended threat, the eye that observed without indulgence, and judged all his actions—it did not help to action. It cramped him. If she did not know clearly what she wanted, he knew too well that she would want him to do something that he could not and would not do. For some time he had been aware of her scenting in the newspapers, in books, in speeches, in the air of the times, the odor of acts of violence, whose smoke rises from the sides of the old world: to right, to left, everywhere, near and far, in America, in Russia, in Italy, in the Balkans, in Central Europe. These outbursts of frenzy are, for the most part, disorderly; they

seem to lead only to destruction: but the blindest and most bloody are a revolt against life. Anything rather than to remain supine. *Ignavia est jacere* . . . And this revolt accumulating in Assia, made her observe with unavowable avidity (which she did not admit to herself) even the rising of the Fascisms which are finishing off the anemic liberties of Europe by beating them to death with a cudgel. But her herd instinct, the call of the blood, drew her by preference to the combats of the U.S.S.R. She was slipping down an irresistible declivity towards the blood-stained destinies where a new world was being worked out by violence. By the intuition of threatened love, Marc caught a glimpse of the mysterious workings of the mind of silent Assia: he saw her about to roll down the slope and he wanted to hold her back, but he did not dare to look at the slope himself: the U.S.S.R. gave him vertigo, and he avoided mentioning it to Assia. He made a side attack from a different direction, upon events in Italy; he tried to extract from her a word of blame, an outburst against these organized crimes. Assia's lips remained sealed. Marc exclaimed:

"Surely, Assia, you won't say that you sympathize with what they are doing?"

She replied in a hard voice, without deigning to look at him:

"More, in any case, than with what *others* don't do."

Marc was cut to the heart. There was nothing to answer. He knew too well that he did nothing, could do nothing. His health had never entirely recovered from the terrible illness before his marriage; and premature marriage, with the mad expenditure of his convalescent energies which it had led to, was not calculated to re-establish it. To this he owed first reprieve and then exemption from his military service; and this saved him the

trial of refusing, as he was determined to do, and from condemnation. But, perhaps, it would have been more wholesome for him to brave it out, for the feeling of having resisted would have assured him against himself. He would have liked to do so, even with no object, even now that there was nothing to oblige him to assert himself; he would have liked to do so, to declare himself, out of pure defiance. But his two counselors had opposed it. Assia, because she could not understand the vanity of useless bravado. (Excusable if he had been forced to make a decision! Though in that case she thought like the communists that one's duty was to enter the ranks so as to take the enemy's arms, not to refuse them!) She thought conscientious objection silly. Annette, who knew its greatness, avoided pushing Marc into it, because she felt that his conviction was doubtful, and that his refusal would be due more to pride than to sincere faith. And too many "reasonable" reasons pleaded with him to accept the loophole: the expected child, his heavy duties as a family man, and his health. He escaped. But his morale was weakened; he regretted a battle not engaged in, a defeat (Assia had put her finger on the sore spot)—*"what he had not done."* He felt smaller.

He ought to have taken his revenge by some other action—either by word or in writing—but, as we have seen, his opportunities for doing so were very limited. He could not act, even through his pen; he could publish nothing but a few words, at long intervals, which awoke no echoes. He was walled up in his prison of individualism. His only light came from above, from the empty sky. Only his mother could put up with that. (Could she put up with it? She did not tell others what it lacked, and that this sky was not enough for her. . . .) But all the

same she could breathe, she had made for herself a beyond there.

Marc had none. That beyond is as much the kingdom of death as the kingdom of the infinite. Marc needed windows looking out on the world of the living. And to jump out of the window into it . . . Then jump! Can't you see Assia's eye under its lid, watching your movements? If you climb on to the window-ledge, she will have sprung to the ground before you . . . Yes, he saw it. He saw that that was what she wanted of him, what she was waiting for.

But he could not make up his mind. Below, there was that tyranny of violence, which he loathed. He loathed it all the more that it was in his blood . . . his feverish blood, which would be only too much inclined to tyrannize. Since, thank God! he could not do so—he trembled, sometimes, at the thought of the abuses he would have been guilty of—he could not tolerate it from others. He concentrated all his violence on not yielding an inch of what belonged to him: his own being. Ah! if Revolution were—as of yore, when it aborted in fireworks—a free outburst of revolt, when one throws everything into the common heap, every man his own! But to-day it is militarized. It is a barracks. Discipline extends to everything, actions, writings and thoughts. Even to philosophy and science which the new priests of the sickle and hammer have pretensions of governing. Have they not fulminated anathema against the free hypotheses of physics and modern energetics which escape from the channel of the materialistic Marxist Gospel! . . . And perhaps they are within their rights if they are determined that Anno I of the Revolution shall be Anno Hegira: the holy war must have its Koran . . . But Marc kicked against imposed

gods. He could not understand fooling in the field of spirit. My spirit is my own. Don't dare to touch it!

It was quite indifferent to Assia. The spirit, like the body, is for him who can take it—for the strongest. And the strongest will keep it only as long as I like. I will take it back when I want to.

VII

She was becoming detached from this Frenchman who did not know how to take or completely to renounce—whose whole energy was dissipated in not making up his mind to anything. She looked around her, and began to draw comparisons which were not to his advantage.

Annette had introduced her into French circles where an attempt, still rather feeble, was being made to bring about a cultural *rapprochement* with the U.S.S.R. There she had met certain Russians of the Soviet organizations. Annette had come into contact with some of them in the days when she was working for Timon. They had had time to study her. They took time to study her daughter-in-law. Assia received orders for Russian translations for an Exhibition of International Decorative Arts, which was being organized in Paris: articles on Russian peasant art, weaving, toys, Palekh lacquers, the theater, etc. Then pamphlets of skillful intellectual propaganda. Then more technical works for the Soviet Commercial Representation in Paris. At first she did the work at home. Then, after a fairly long interval of observation, corroborated by the testimony of a childhood friend working for the Soviet Embassy, who saw her, not without reserve, at long intervals, the door was cautiously opened, and Assia was admitted to the antechamber. When her child was weaned (and Assia did not consult him in the matter) she shunted him onto Annette, who asked nothing better, and went to work at the Commercial Representation. Like the candidates to Christianity in the early days who were allowed to follow the services in the porch, outside the sanctuary,

Assia had her work table in a side room off the hall. And, little by little, she spent whole days there.

She took a pleasure in it, the nature of which she did not try to explain to herself. She did not admit that she found herself once more on the native soil of her mind. She pretended, not without rancor, to think herself liberated from it. But this pretense provided an escape from the other soil where she had taken root. . . . "You don't hold me . . . Nor you, nor you!" She felt relieved. In the evening, on leaving the Russian atmosphere, she went back to her French hearth with greater pleasure. But she had to leave it to be able to appreciate it thoroughly. A good excuse to herself for flying from it!

It was not a good excuse to Marc (besides, Assia did not mention it to him; she would not have condescended to excuses). He was gloomy. He immured himself in a stiff and angry silence. It was the worst thing he could have done. He looked like an angry master. It is all very well to play the master if one is the stronger. But if one is the weaker, how ridiculous! The supple spine of an Assia would have quivered, not without pleasure, under the claw, ready to take her revenge later! But his sulky lips, his knitted brows, his futile bad temper, which did not deign to (dared not) express itself . . . were just enough to let her see that he had the will, if not the power to subject her. Rather he incited her to enfranchize herself. Assia took a hostile pleasure in boasting to him about what she had learnt. It was inevitable that in both their minds comparisons should arise between the sterile opposition of Marc and the fruitful energy of the eternally active U.S.S.R. Marc, who drew these comparisons himself, and suffered from them, would not tolerate that Assia should make them to him. The duel of their minds became embittered; they accentuated what divided them by

expressing it. In the end Marc asked Assia, in an imperative tone, to cease going to the office. Assia firmly replied: "No!" She was free. . . .

A strange way of asserting one's liberty, to rush to those who had established over the immense Union of Socialist Soviet Republics the iron hand of ideological, social, economic, and police dictatorship, and would have liked to establish it over all the rest of the world! But in contrast to Western liberalism, unorganized, invertebrate, without boldness or vigor, the plaything of the worst exploiters, the brutality of Moscow, employed in the service of the exploited classes, had the effect of a keen wind that whips up and purifies the blood. It cleared the brain, heavy and oxidized with the rust of the French thought without will. No servitude is so repugnant as that which accepts and deceives itself, or sulks without virile revolt—that of the West. Assia felt freer under the spurs of a dictatorship which bestrode the people to ride them to victory, than penned in the enclosures of a pseudo-democracy which allows its flock to graze—or die of hunger—but not to go out or act while waiting to be disposed of, either for war or for peace,—or for shearing or the butcher's stall. If she had been told that she and hers would be given privileged treatment, such as democracies give to those sold to the press or to Parliament or to those selected for fattening, Assia would have spat their favors back in their faces. Favor is but another servitude, the basest, that which is paid for. That servitude, at least, her Marc would never accept, and there was no danger that it would be offered him: that is why he was still dear to her. But why did he resign himself to refusing servitude without overthrowing the enslaving order? True, he could not do so without binding himself to a discipline of combat, which was a new contract of servitude, but consented

to, temporary, and for an end which made sacrifices legitimate.

It must be added that the rigor of these dictators appeared much diminished to Assia when considered from the rue de Grenelle. The chain was extended there, especially for a free passer-by who came and sniffed at it. Dictatorship is light when weighed from without. Assia's thoughts did not take it into account, for the moment. Assia had nothing to do with the means; she saw the work and the ends. Both excited her. They were building a new world, to fit some hundred and sixty millions of human beings, who of their own will, or by force, were enrolled in the works. The imbecility of the old world, incapable of opposing or accepting, had endeavored to smother them by blockading them in their ruined house, and depriving them of the outside air. They had taken up the challenge, and made murderous necessity the law of their creative impulse. From the ruins of the old building were rising Babylonian structures of the Spirit that captures the forces of the elements. The first outlines were appearing of the great Plans from which were to come forth not only broods of prehistoric monsters—Dnieprostois, Autostroys, Magnitogorsks—who, with their trunks and tusks, extract their sustenance from water, air and earth, but all the nations of workers who give pasture to the great flocks of mastodons, blast-furnaces, and factories and cyclopean dams. A stern and fiery exaltation led these gangs to the fray, contracted their muscles and their foreheads, and instituted between them games of heroic rivalry—which should be first to conquer the enormous task and make sure the indestructible foundations upon which was arising day by day the supremacy of human labor, free, equal, and sovereign. No sacrifice is disproportionate to such an end. No present evil, no evil to

self or kin, is too high a price to pay for the future good which they dream of, will, and build for all mankind in days to come. Those in the West who lament, or wax indignant, at the destruction by the U.S.S.R. of gods, churches, and religions—those dead would do better to bury their dead! Nothing more will come forth from those whited sepulchers. They do not see, they cannot see with their empty eye-sockets that in the East, once more, a God is born! This proletarian, Marxist, materialistic, atheistical youth, sacrificing itself with serious joy to the happiness and social welfare which shall be, when it shall be no more, has more religion in its hammer and sickle than the false devotees of the lying West in all their paternosters, clerical or lay. Outside action, there is nothing but is a lie. Deeds alone cannot lie. By their deeds let them be judged, men over there and here!

In her passionate injustice, Assia thus made out the balance sheet of her Marc's life: Nothing. She knew very well that his inaction was forced, that he suffered from it like an insect full of life fastened to a board with a pin. But she had no pity when she saw that other insects had torn themselves, all bleeding, from the pin! Let him do the same! She would kiss his wounds heartily, as she would have come near to kissing the scar which cut a livid streak across the strong cheek of Dito Djanelidze.

He was on a secret mission of the Komintern in France, with no official title, and feared by the officials. At the Representation, where he came in, passed and installed himself without ceremony, he seemed to visitors a silent witness, rather in the way, and of no importance: he smoked one cigarette after another, showing no sign of interest in the conversations; but the representative sought his eye before giving an answer. He was tall and stout, with a heavy frame, but supple noiseless move-

ments. He had a crop of thick, strong, and very black hair, growing low. The forehead was marked by a deep transverse furrow, and strong raised eyebrows. The half-closed eyes practiced division of labor: one said cunning, the other hardness. Other features stood out: a long nose, broad at the top, fleshy at the tip, with thick, but tight nostrils; a stiff mustache; broad cheeks; the jaw on guard, sneering as it kept watch. The whole physiognomy denoted raillery mingled with implacable observation. He was under forty.

Assia was not slow in noticing him. He did not seem to notice her. His double glance had, indeed, picked her up, weighed her, fur and feathers, and dropped the game. He had better game to hunt. This had annoyed her. She conceived a violent antipathy for him. She pretended not to notice his presence. People sometimes stopped to talk in the room where she worked; and, with Slav familiarity, she would join in the discussion without interrupting her copying. Two or three times, Dito Djanelidze cut her short, fairly ungraciously, with an ironical remark. Assia raged without showing it, pretending not to hear. He laughed inwardly; but no sign of the laugh was apparent. One day when she was working alone he came and sat down at the other side of her table. She raised her head, and saw his broad face with the searching eyes almost touching hers, and the banter at the corner of his mouth. But this time there was no unkindness in his irony. Assia frowned crossly. He laughed in her face. For all her efforts, she could not succeed in feeling angry any more. To save herself from laughing too, she bent her angry forehead and went on with her work. He spread his broad hand over the page and said:

"Stop! Let's talk."

"But if I don't choose to talk?" she said.

"But you do choose."

She choked at his impudence, she stared him in the face and said:

"No!"

"That means yes," he said calmly.

"In what language?"

"In yours."

And before she could answer, he offered:

"A cigarette, comrade?"

His look, his tone, the word "comrade" conquered her. Unwillingly, she took the cigarette:

"I have my work to do. No time to waste."

"Yes, you go at it. You would be more in your place with us."

"What should I do there? Do you even know who I am?"

"Of course, I know."

"I was with Denikine's Whites."

"But you are not with them now."

"What do you know about it?"

"I know."

She was so disgusted at his assurance that for a moment she would have liked to be in the other camp, in order to give him the lie. But she was too honest with herself. She had to be content with casting a furious look at him. Dito's throat moved with his silent laugh. She had lit her cigarette mechanically at Dito's, and chewed it with rage. She spat out the end she had bitten off and said, provoking him:

"And do you know what I shall be to-morrow, too?"

"It's evident. You will be with us. You are already."

He was not laughing now. And she kept silent. She was conquered. They smoked for a moment, in silence. She looked towards the window. It was clear enough;

it was the only direction in which she could go. Towards that action of a nation—her nation—over there. She had known it for a long time. But he was the first to say it aloud, for her . . . She still tried to defend herself. She said, as if talking to herself:

"I cannot accept any yoke. I would rather die than sacrifice my independence; I have suffered everything to keep it."

"And you got married," he said ironically.

"My husband is like myself. He thinks as I do."

"And he got married," repeated the mocker.

She wanted to parry the blow—she cheated:

"Two are stronger than one," she said.

"And a hundred and sixty million, how much more so!"

It was what she thought. But her individualism rejected the thought.

"But I can't marry a hundred and sixty million!"

"Why not?" he asked. "You're hefty."

"I am," she said, "but I don't want to."

"You will some day."

She had accepted this tone despite herself. She had to keep it up. Her lips said (her ears were astonished to hear herself say):

"Comrade, what I do is my own affair. Do me the pleasure of looking after your own concerns."

"You concern me."

They stared into each other's eyes, chin in hands, blowing their cigarette smoke into each other's faces. Assia said:

"You've got brass."

"I have," said he.

"What do you want of me?"

"That you should serve us."

"The word 'serve' is not in my papers."

"Yes, it is," he said; "you can't read."

She flew into a rage: his tone of insolent assurance had exasperated her too long.

"After all!" she cried, banging her fist on the table, "do I dispose of myself, or do you?"

"Neither you, nor I," he said, "but the law."

"What law?"

"The law of nature. The law of combat. Either for us or against us. You cannot be against us."

"I was able."

"You were not able!"

"Don't defy me! Or I will tell you all I have done."

"Useless. Would you like me to tell *you?*"

Leaning towards her, in an undertone, in clipped words, his teeth clenched on his cigarette, he flung at her, pell-mell, half a dozen little events which she thought were known only to herself, or had disappeared with those who had been accomplices or victims therein; some had occurred in the forests of the Ukraine, and others in her solitary garret in Paris. The hair of her flesh stood up. Her spine went cold, she stiffened:

"Enough! Your informers have earned their bread. Don't expect me to eat any of it! If I am a bitch, I am a thin bitch, I will remain so."

"They are the best," he said. "I do not expect you to change. Be only what you are! But dare to be it! Be it openly! You are not of those who can be content with indefinitely weighing pros and cons, like the tight-rope dancers of Paris. . . ."

He added:

"Like your own husband."

She reacted to the sudden blow:

"I forbid you to speak of him."

She looked like a cat with back arched, about to fly at his eyes.

"There is no need for me to speak of him," he said; "you think exactly the same of him as I do."

"It's not true!" she said. "You are not worthy to tie his shoes."

He jeered.

"I leave that honor to you. But I have a notion that his shoes are badly tied."

"Do you spy even into my bedroom?"

He had stopped smoking. He caught hold of Assia's arm, and said, in a good-natured, but serious, tone:

"Enough of fooling, child! Let's talk without sparring! We have the right (or we take it) to observe everything that can be of use to us. But it needs no spectacles to see that you and he are not made to drag the same cart. . . . Let me speak! . . . I am saying nothing against your stable-companion. He has, or may have, every virtue. But those virtues are not yours. It is you that are rearing between the shafts. You are right."

"I am wrong," she said. "He sees the goal as well as I do. He is not afraid to make for it. His heart is braver than mine. But his brain is too full of those Western ideas which beat against one's legs, and prevent one from advancing. He still needs time to free himself from them."

"We have no time. Let him decide. Or you decide! Bring him to us, or drop him! This is not the epoch for young Hamlets, stuck on the edge of the cemetery. 'To be, or not to me . . .' He who does not want to be, let him be buried! Pull him out of the hole, or shove him into it! But, first, get out of it yourself! And come! You'll find substitutes for him."

She looked him up and down contemptuously:

"You?"

"Me or another. No matter who! I'm not after the succession. I've got something better to do. And so have you. Don't waste your time over trifles."

She said, "Brute!" drew away from him and got up.

He remained seated at the table:

"The shoe pinches you. Let it pinch. What I say is true. Your private histories are of no account compared to the great history we have to write. When the stomach is hungry, let it be fed! But let it keep quiet! It is only a stomach, nothing more. And we have the whole human animal to serve, those millions of beings, starving, not only for bread and love, but for light and liberty."

She said, opening the door to go out:

"You dare to talk of liberty, you!"

Before the door closed, she heard:

"We dare, we. Those who are incapable of climbing to it alone, we hoist up by force. We'll hoist you up."

She slammed the door:

"No!"

That night she had an altercation with Marc, who called crime all constraint exercised upon the soul of another. He had only just discovered the Non-Violence of Gandhi. She said, more clear-sighted in opposition than he was in admiration:

"And you can't see that it is violence upside down!"

He was obstinate; so was she.

"Everything is violence," she said, "even love. Love above all. It makes one a slave. It makes one false to one's nature. It is degrading."

"If you feel like that," he said, wounded, "free yourself!"

She said, with a bitter twist of the mouth:

"Thank you for the permission!"

VIII

She was back at her work, but she had sworn to refuse any further conversation with the bear. She was not put to that trouble. Djanelidze was away from Paris for a fortnight, and when he reappeared he took no notice of her. She was piqued. She had gathered information about him during his absence. She was not the only woman whose attention was taken up by this individual. He was feared and admired: they talked about him with ill-natured fascination. A good deal of legend was mixed with truth in what they told about his life; but, as the proverb says, people lend only to the rich. He was the son of a butcher in Baku; he took part very early in the outbursts, bomb-throwing and violent "expropriations" organized against public and private funds by the Young Communist Party of the Caucasus, round about 1905. He was five or six times imprisoned, deported to distant parts of Asia; he escaped, and began again. In the days of October he was a member of the revolutionary War Committee, and, better fitted for action than speech, he was sent to every center of the fire to stir it up; he never refused the most dangerous or thankless task; he never disputed with the ambitious or "vain-glorious" of the party for the meat of power: what he wanted was the bone to crush—the enemy. (The enemy is everything that threatens the cause; and all means are good to suppress it. Action risked for the cause never has a bad smell.) He was of those who, noiseless and nameless, spread over the world a web of secret watchfulness, stealing the flies from the other spider, the "Intelligence Service" of the British Empire. His strong physical life was easily satis-

fied, he would snatch a morsel anyhow, and might almost be said to sleep standing up; he had no time to hang about a woman. But when his practiced eye discerned in passing a source of energy—a glowing coal-mine to capture for the service of the cause—he stretched out his claw, and stamped it, willing or unwilling, property of the State. He had stamped Assia. He might know nothing of her feminine nature, her humor, the desires that come of sex, for he took no account of the feminine, the *"ewig weiblich"*; but he knew better than she did the *"ewig menschlich,"* the strong instincts which, beyond the threshold of sex, spring from the knot of interlaced serpents of human entrails, the famished jaw of being, male or female, which is like an internal torch, burning to be, to grow, to create, to devour, to destroy, and to act. He had no need to place his hand on Assia's body to feel the torch burning within.

For all Assia's struggles, it was she who sought him out. One day, as he was going out without looking at her, she got up—all her papers were put away—and said:

"Comrade, shall we walk together?"

They went out. Djanelidze took more notice of the passers-by than of the woman who kept pace with him. But certain questions which she asked him roused his attention; he looked at her: the fish was nibbling. Assia questioned him with anxious eagerness upon the problems of new Russia and the chances of the struggle on foot. She was not pretending. She was caught. And Djanelidze changed his tone, he could speak. So as not to raise his voice, he passed his arm through Assia's and walked along bending close to her ear; a curl of the woman's hair brushed his mouth, and Assia felt his breath entering her ear with his words. They never noticed that it was raining till they were wet through. In order to

continue the discussion, Djanelidze and Assia went into an old café for people with small incomes. He was in no hurry that day; he had finished his business in France; he was leaving on the following evening. Seated at a table at the far end of a room three-quarters empty and badly lighted, with wishy-washy tea before them, they talked quietly, with that volubility of tongue which the Slavs alone share with the Italians, untiringly, forehead to forehead; and she questioned him with passionate interest. But soon she ceased questioning, to listen better. And Djanelidze, feeling the interest he was exciting, let his heavy and powerful flood flow on. He told of the epic struggle of the U.S.S.R. against hordes of enemies, from within and without; sometimes he played an episodic part, but he spoke of himself as of another, or rather as a limb of some monstrous myriapod. The central figure of his stories made one think of an ant-heap; and Assia, who had by instinct an aversion to the myriad, to her stupefaction drank in the ecstasy of the nameless ant that participates in that multitudinous life. She lost her individuality by plunges into an oily, smoking stream of naphtha; she struggled out, in starts of revolt, but she felt that she would fall in again; and the heavy voice of Djanelidze pulled at her legs, like a hand. All her conceptions tottered, and values were modified in passing from the plane of the individual to the collective. It was only later, when she was alone, that she remembered, with dismay, this suction of the octopus. But that horror retained a sacred character; it was beyond her strength to judge it. Her reason was overtaken by the fumes of the beverage. Djanelidze's was used to it, long since. His brain was cold and lucid in intoxication. Perhaps Assia's vertigo was so strong only because she had found again the human river whose overflowing waters had

swept her along years ago in that nightmare of defeat. But this time she was on the raft, sitting beside the pilot, and under her legs, between the planks, she could see the flowing water. She shut her eyes, dug in her nails, her head went round . . .

It was nearly nine o'clock at night when she found herself still sitting on a chair in a district bar, and remembered her home. She started, and said good-night. She ran nearly all the way back. She expected to find Marc in the sulks, and admitted that he had some justification for it; the poor boy, with his French habits of order and punctuality! She was ready to apologize, though it was always a bone in her throat to be obliged to render accounts. She had nothing to hide, she always told everything without being asked; but it did not do to question her. . . . And she foresaw that the blunderer would not have the sense to hold his tongue. But, so be it! For this once she was ready to swallow the bone, she knew she was in the wrong. . . .

She was spared the trouble. He put himself entirely in the wrong. She found a Marc exasperated by waiting, who had feared and imagined all sorts of things, and who received her with the airs of a judge. She immediately lost her laughing contrite inclination to explain matters affectionately. She went to her room, without a word, to take off her wet clothes, and then into the dining room, to serve the cold supper with haste. He hung round her, with a fateful air, his throat dry, holding back his cross-examination. She saw him, under her eye-lashes, without seeming to take any notice of him; she felt like shrugging her shoulders. Finally he asked in a magisterial tone:

"Where have you been?"

She replied curtly that, on leaving the office, she had had an interview which had delayed her.

"Who with?"

"With someone you don't know."

She felt herself that the answer was unsatisfactory, she looked up, ready to smile; and when she saw her big boy in torture, she went to him, to kiss him. But he had scarcely touched her when he pushed her away in a fury. He shouted at her:

"You disgust me! Your hair and dress reek of tobacco. Where have you been draggling them?"

She was annoyed, but she admitted that he was not altogether in the wrong; she said:

"In a café; the smell may have clung to me; but you might be polite."

He repeated:

"In a café! You have been gadding about for four hours!"

She saw that he did not believe her. She said:

"Come, my boy! . . ."

And she went to him again. But the violent, nervous boy, strained almost to hysteria by a sudden fit of jealousy, drew back from her with disgust. And he shouted:

"Don't touch me!"

Assia said:

"You're mad."

She sat down and began to eat. He had gone into the next room, and did not come back. Assia called:

"Marc! . . ."

He did not answer. She finished her supper. She peeped into the next room. He was lying on a divan, and did not move. . . . The great baby! . . . She said, pitying him:

"Marc, will you listen to me? . . ."

He replied icily:

"It's no use, you would only lie."

Assia's blood rushed to her forehead. She had not an ounce of pity left.

"What on earth do you think?" she asked harshly.

He made no answer.

"Idiot!" she exclaimed with a hiss of contempt.

She turned her back on him. . . . "Believe me or not! . . ." She went into her room and went to bed. He remained, lying in the other room, but several times in the night she heard him walking about. Assia raged, in her bed. Never, for an instant, had seduction entered into her conversations with Djanelidze; neither of them had even thought of it. And this idiot thought of it for both, he thought of nothing else, he forced her to think of it. Much use it was to spare him! . . . A diabolical malice made her think of *"the eel of Mélun that cried out before it was skinned."* Cry out, my friend! You shall have something to cry out for. . . . But the threat was merely verbal. She had not the least desire to skin him. The poor lad had a tender skin. . . . Comparison with the other, the rough rasping hide of the wolf, thrust itself upon her; and a shiver went down her spine. She repulsed the wolf, but he was there; she could feel his hot breath on her face, in the dark. She turned her back, irritated. But he was there. The breath burned her neck. . . . That fool, obliging her to think of it and draw comparisons! . . . She went over the whole conversation of the evening, the heavy torrent of images and thoughts, that male, savage, muddy world, that new world, whose hide, nevertheless, retained the strong familiar odor of her native soil and of the past. She sniffed it up with hypnotized repugnance; all her pores were impregnated with it. She got up in a fever to wash her face, hands and stomach. She got into bed again. It was the sheets that should have been changed . . .

Marc was moving about in the next room. She twisted and turned. . . . "The fool! The fool! . . ." She weighed him in the balance, against the other. He did not weigh much, with his stupid jealousy, his selfishness, his despotism, all his thoughts shriveling round his own ego, me, me, and me. . . . "You belong to me, you are mine. . . ." "Belong to you? I belong to nobody. If I give myself let it be to more than a man, to those great forces which upheave and lead a world! . . . In these alone I find my way and my bed. I fulfill myself . . ." And she felt round her thighs the clasp of him who was behind her. She was crushed as by a millstone, till she shrieked inwardly at it . . . She switched on the light, and sat up choking, her breasts swollen, breathing in heavy gasps. . . .

She got out of bed again, and sitting, half-naked, in an armchair, recovered her self-control. She tried to explain to herself the enigma of this man who obsessed her, to take his mechanism to pieces. She tried to separate in him that which belonged to himself, and that which belonged to the great mysterious, multitudinous Force, the working machine of which he was a driving belt. She persuaded herself that the machine was everything, the belt nothing. That one, or another, no matter which, would serve the purpose . . . She remembered what he had said to her—"Me, or another . . ." She shook her head angrily. . . . "Certainly not you! . . ." She examined him in detail, from head to foot, as if he stood there before her. She felt her own pulse. She did not cheat. Not an artery beat harder or quicker. Her heart was without desire. What do I care whether this man lives or dies! . . .

She went back to bed, her breathing calm, her brain cool again. She slept till morning.

Opening her eyes, she went over the stupid misunderstanding. There was wrong on both sides. The tension had been increasing for some months, and while both acknowledged their faults, they had not the wisdom or the energy to change matters. Marc's unstable temperament was shaken by fits of anger, like nervous squalls, which shattered him; he passed from a disproportioned expenditure of passion to exhaustion; and that very fatigue, no less than passion, laid him open to fits of fury. Assia had sudden alternations from obstinate silence to a flow of angry words, jealousies, susceptibilities, fixed morbid ideas, which coincided with her little tides, or were roused by a word, a clumsy gesture, to which her imagination, already wounded, attributed intentions which were not there. The inevitable result was brutal and frantic jars, in which both took leave of their senses, followed by a return to reason and regrets, but rarely on both sides at the same time. Yet not for a moment, even when words insulting as blows ran highest, was great love absent. But it hid itself, shamed and wounded, in the depths of their hearts. . . .

At that moment Assia recognized that she was not quite innocent of the exasperation into which Marc had fallen that night. Instead of appeasing his loving anxiety (by no means unjustified) lest Assia should be taken from him again by the alien soul of that Russia which was closed to him, an evil instinct had driven Assia to stir up his suspicions. She had prolonged her absences from home beyond reason. She had invited to her house comrades, chance acquaintances, Russians of the Commercial Representation, whose familiarity and chattering with Assia in that language which Marc did not understand, had caused him stupid annoyance; in the altercation which followed, he had gone so far as to forbid Assia to receive

such visitors in his house (the words were hardly said when he owned to himself that he had exceeded his rights). The result had been that Assia received her comrades away from home. And the suspicions flourished all the more. Assia acknowledged herself just as stupid in having provoked them for the pleasure of subduing Marc and affirming her own independence. At that rate they were heading straight for catastrophe; she had sufficient experience to foresee it. They were mad. . . . Holla, holla! . . . Stop! . . .

She got up, quite resolved to put things right. If Marc was a naughty boy with wild eyes, it was for her to bring him back maternally to good sense. In the depths of her heart he was more her child than her husband, and the best of the available reserve of love was entered to the credit of the child. But when she opened the door of the room where Marc had spent the night, he was not there. He had gone out, without leaving a word. Assia resented this, and her good resolutions were extinguished like a candle blown out. However, she forced herself to wait for him (perhaps to put him further in the wrong). She gave up the idea of going to work at her office as usual. She owned to no regret, although it was the last opportunity to see Djanelidze before he left. But perhaps this thought incited her to stay away, in order to prove her indifference to herself. What did she care? . . . She busied herself about tidying up the flat; it needed it! She was always out, and, day after day, dust and disorder spread over everything. She was in the middle of her cleaning when Annette came to fetch little Vania. (She took care of him all day, and brought him back in the evening.) But Assia would not let her in, upon the pretext that everything was upside down, and she did not want anyone to see her pigsty;

she thrust the child to her through the half-opened door; Annette only caught a flying glimpse, in the dim passage, of the silhouette of her daughter-in-law, on her knees furiously polishing the floor, her head bent, her hair coming down and hanging about her cheeks in rat's tails. She was avenging herself on the furniture for Marc's failure to come home.

He did not come in for lunch. She waited. He did not come. . . .

"Idiot! You're sulking! . . . I'll be even with you."

She choked with impatience, as she swallowed the mouthfuls. She did not finish her meal. She dressed herself, she surveyed herself in the glass. She showed her teeth, sharp as a young dog's, at herself. She wanted to bite. She was ready to go out. What for? To see whom? . . . That "whom?" took her unawares. She started. She sat down again, with her hat on, as if on a visit, and she took up a review from the table; she tried to get interested in it. . . . To blazes with it, no go! . . . Her nervous hand flung the review to the other end of the room. . . . She tapped her heel on the floor. . . . It struck three.

"I've had enough of this! . . ."

She went out. She had no avowed purpose. She said to herself that she would visit a sale of white goods in a department store. But she went in a different direction. She discovered it when she had gone too far to turn back.

"So much the worse! It will do some other day. But what shall I do to-day? . . ."

She was within ten minutes of the Commercial Representation.

"It's too late. I won't go. . . ."

Yet she went in that direction. Of course, she would not go in. She had no need to go in. On the opposite

pavement of the boulevard, within forty feet, she saw the broad shoulders and head of Djanelidze approaching through the crowd. She had a shock. She discovered that before seeing him she was going towards him. She was annoyed. She was frightened. She stopped stock-still before a shop window, with her back to the street. She was waiting till he had passed. He did not pass. He crossed the road, and without a word stood beside her before the shop window. He winked at her from the corner of his lowered eyelid. She turned and surveyed him. He did not seem to be looking at her. But his Mongol eyes were laughing. He said:

"Are you playing truant?"

She ignored the question, and said:

"I thought you were gone."

She was lying, and he knew it; she had asked him the time of his departure, on the previous evening. He replied:

"I am going. I am on the way home to pack now. Then to the station. Are you free? Come with me."

But he did not take her arm, as before. He kept at some distance from her. He said, without looking at her:

"Don't appear to know me. I am being shadowed, or I may be."

He took all sorts of twists and turns, going up side streets and passages that brought him back to the same boulevard; with quick glances over his shoulder he made sure that he was not being followed. Yet, he managed, in the double stream of passers-by, to exchange a few rapid, caustic words in their own language, keeping his face in profile. When they had reached the threshold of a house at the corner of two streets, he glanced quickly all round him and said:

"Let's go up!"

She hesitated. He added:

"You might help me pack my trunk."

He took her by the elbow and they went in. He pushed her onto the steep dark staircase. She could not see where she was going. He pressed his hand into the small of her back. The broad hand seemed to grip her like a bird. But it was no domestic fowl. She stiffened herself to hard resistance, ready for the stroke of the beak —also perhaps in order to feel the hand better. On the narrow landing he stretched his arm in front of her to put the key in the keyhole. He pushed the door and the woman. They were in a little untidy room, the window of which, looking onto the courtyard, was shut, and the curtains drawn. Djanelidze shared it for the time being with a workman; he changed his lodging every two days. At this hour the room was unoccupied; the lodger only came in at night. All Djanelidze's things, linen and papers, more papers than linen, were scattered over the bed, table, and floor. Djanelidze took them up in piles, and threw them into an old leather trunk with a handle. He piled them up in vain, he would never be able to get them all in. Assia took the pile of things out and re-arranged them. The vitiated air was stifling; her back was wet with perspiration. She wanted to open the window; he objected, for fear of being seen by the neighbors. She took off her coat and undid the collar of her dress and tucked it in; he was in his shirt-sleeves. They spoke but little, and only about the task in hand; he passed the things to her, she folded them, sitting back on her heels on the floor, her throat and the nape of her neck bare; she was in a bath of perspiration. . . . She turned giddy for a moment, she saw herself in bed, the night before; and a warm muzzle breathing on her back. She had

just time to turn round; leaning over her, Djanelidze was sniffing her. And his great claw fell upon her and flung her backwards.

When she sat up again upon the floor, her eyes were wild, her mouth dry, her body burning, she had a savage air. They did not exchange a word. She did not think of accusing him, or herself. It was written! But it would not have done for him to risk touching her again. The portcullis had fallen between them once more. He understood it perfectly, for he had the rarest understanding, that of the body. He stood away from her, and rolling a cigarette, he watched her, at his feet, cold and gloomy, putting up her hair. There was no pride of conquest in him. He had neither prepared, nor willed the capture; nature alone had done it all: there was no need to linger over it.

Assia finished packing the trunk, from which some of the things had fallen out. When all was in order, she closed the lid, he pressed it down, locked and strapped it. She got up and put on her coat. He said:

"Go down! It is better for you that we should not go out together!"

She looked at herself in a pocket mirror. When she was ready, she went towards the door. He held out his hand, and said:

"Good-by, comrade."

She came back and put her hand in his. While he held it (they looked gravely at each other, she with her hard forehead bowed, but eyes plumbing eyes), he said:

"And bring us your husband! I count on him and on you."

Such a remark, at such a moment, showed a strange lack of taste. She did not even notice it. He added:

"He is trying to find his way. It would be a pity for him to get lost. You know the way. Show it to him! His place is amongst us."

She did not answer. She agreed with what he said. She was grateful to him for saying it. It was only later that she realized that he must have had Marc spied upon. But what would have thrown Marc into a fury, hardly annoyed her; she had grown used to thinking that sort of thing quite natural, one has a right to get information! . . . Her hand, still moist, responded to the pressure of his large hand, and freed itself. She said:

"Good-by."

And she went out.

She walked along the street, without looking back. It was the end of the day. The top stories of the houses, on one side of the boulevard, were reddened by the sunset. She was not thinking; she was too full for thought. She felt neither pleasure nor pain. Simply that the hard asphalt was good to tread on with her hard feet. At a corner near the Seine, which was flooded with the last rays of the sun, she stopped, struck by a blow:

"What have I done! . . ."

She recalled everything tumultuously; but only for an instant; and severely, without tumult, she made out her account. She bit her lip, humiliated. The debit was against her. She had played imprudently and lost.—Lost? If it had merely concerned herself, it would not have worried her for long. One gambles and loses, one has lost, think no more of it! The thing in itself has only the importance one gives to it. Assia gave it none. Her chief regret was not for the fact itself, but because she had consented by surprise when her will did not consent. She esteemed herself little for it. But she had lost her self-esteem long since. She was not tender to herself.

Proud, yes. But proud of not flattering herself. If she had been alone, the account would have been closed before she got home. But she was not alone. At home there was *the other*—he whose presence, whose existence was a bit that irritated her, but which she loved to champ, because to her, its iron taste lent a savor to life—*the other*, the partner whose name stood with hers in a joint account. What would he think of it? She knew how terribly serious he was in these matters. He judged of honor like an old bourgeois, and put it in places that honor had nothing to do with. Assia had been ironical to him on the subject for a long time. But though she did not own it to herself, that irony made him seem to her more worthy of respect. If she did not tell him of her stupid adventure, he would know nothing about it, he would be at peace, no one on earth would trouble him with it. . . . But there! That was just the one course which was excluded. Assia had struck it out of her books. The fact in itself, the "delinquency" (whatever one likes to call it!) sat relatively light upon her. But silence about the "delinquency" was for her the real delinquency. No, no, she refused to take it upon herself. She was willing to wrong Marc, but she would not "be false" to him. For her "to be false" was solely to lie (or keep silence). She did not play false. She did not cheat.

She made up her mind, therefore, to tell him everything. So much the worse for her! She added *in petto:* "So much the worse for him! . . ." If it had not been for his silly behavior she would not have gone out that day. She bore him a grudge for it. . . . (She exaggerated!) She had made her decision. Noble instincts: uprightness, horror of lying were mixed with it—and some less noble: secret rancors, who knows? perhaps that unavowable psychological curiosity of the Slavs, which moves them to

God knows what actions, to see what effect it will produce in them. "How would she and he react to it? . . ." The experiment was dangerous. She knew it. But danger to her was but one more specious pretext to persist. The danger of an action made it legitimate.

When she saw Marc, her resolve was shaken. She expected a continuation of last night's misunderstanding. She found a Marc who had reflected or repented, a touching Marc, who begged pardon, with that beautiful, humble, tender look that melted one's heart. Assia was thrown out, she could only caress his face with her hands, which his lips caught as they passed. Her soiled hands . . . She drew them away and held them behind her back. She was in a false position now to grant the pardon he begged. She tried to put an end to these reversed parts. She said:

"That's enough, my boy! Let's say no more about it! It's long ago now; what belongs to yesterday is done with."

He was happy.

"Then, it's said! You have forgiven me?"

"Yes," she said. "And now it is for you to forgive."

He exclaimed:

"That was done long ago!"

"Yes, for yesterday. But for to-day?"

"For to-day?"

He was smiling. She did not know now how to begin. Yet she had prepared it all. But now, face to face with him, it became terrible. . . .

"Don't look at me like that! You make it more difficult for me."

She turned his head the other way.

"Say on!"

He did not take it seriously. She could see, in profile, the smile on his cheek. She stamped her foot:

"You are stupid! Don't laugh!"

He turned his head again, in surprise:

"What's the matter with you?"

She stared at him, with gloomy eyes:

"I have been false to you."

He opened his eyes, not understanding.

"No, not false!" she continued. "I do not hide what I have done. . . . To-day I . . . I have . . ." (She became confused . . . Those bewildered, fearful, defenseless eyes, questioning her! . . .) "I don't know how it happened . . ." (She might have said, "I was caught," but her pride refused; she reacted, she became brutal, to make an end of it.) "I have . . . I have just lain with another man." (She had no need to name him. She had drawn Marc's jealous attention to Djanelidze more than once, in her provocative accounts of her days at the Representation . . .)

She saw Marc's pupils dilate, his lips open . . . the blow needed time to sink in. Assia's thoughts reverted to a street urchin whose hand was run over by a carriage wheel, as he was playing: he went on smiling till the dreadful pain reached him: and he howled . . .

Marc did not howl; but his face contracted suddenly, the breath stopped in his throat. He gasped:

"You are lying! . . ."

He entreated:

"Say that you are lying!"

She was frozen with pride and fear.

"I am telling the truth."

She could never have imagined that face. A wounded animal, mad with pain, its eyes murderous. . . . Before she could make a gesture, he had seized her by the throat

and was strangling her. She made no attempt to defend herself. . . . "Strangle! So be it! You have the right . . ." She had not lowered her eyes. It was he who lowered his. He released her. Such anguish in his eyes! . . . That was much more terrible. He stood, a few seconds, his shoulders bent, his arms hanging down, as if uncertain. Then he took a few steps backwards, staggered, and sank down on a low coffer, near the window ledge; he leaned forward and fell with his forehead against the window; he sobbed. His sobs hardly sounded human. It was like a beast mortally wounded. Assia was overwhelmed. She wanted to scream, to run and take him in her arms. And she was paralyzed. She could not utter a word, and her face was frozen. The unexpected excess of this passion petrified her; but within, her heart was wrung like linen in a washerwoman's hands. She had to stand, stiff and straight, with dry eyes, motionless, watching that furious agony. It was torture such as no torturer could have imagined. When, with a jerk of her hips, she managed to free herself, when at last she was able to move her knees, and approach him murmuring:

"My boy, my boy! . . . If I had only known! . . . Don't suffer so! . . . It is not worth it . . ."

He cut short his sobs, raised his head, showing a convulsed but implacable face, and said:

"Get out!"

He had no need of any gesture. His glance was like a fist. He was flinging her out of the house.

Here again, her pride did her ill service. She made no attempt to explain herself. She picked up her coat, which had fallen on the floor; she pinned her collar, from which his furious hands had torn the clasp.

"You are driving me away?"

He groaned.

"Yes!"

He fell back against the window-ledge, his forehead buried in his hands.

Silently, she went into the other room, opened and shut various drawers, gathered up a few things here and there, and came back into the room with a small bag in her hand; she took a last look at Marc sitting collapsed, she opened her lips to speak, she went to the door, opened it, turned back and cried:

"Marc! . . ."

He did not move. She went out.

IX

On the landing of the next floor her legs gave way, she leaned against the wall in the dark, and wept. She wept like a river. She wanted to go up again and say to him, as she said to herself:

"What we are doing, what you are doing is a crime! . . . Is a fool's trick, a dirty trick, a reason for us to ruin our lives? . . ."

She would not admit that he had the right to turn her out.

"Does he love me so little?"

She did not say: "He loves me too much! . . ." She recognized her offense but she would not admit that, in the balance, her offense should outweigh love. It was such a trifle to her! And the worse outrage, so it seemed to her, she had committed against herself, not against him; if there was any betrayal, she had betrayed herself, not him. That surprise of her senses, that infamous eclipse of her will . . . Ah! if he could have seen at this moment the torrent of love that poured towards him! She loved him much more now! . . . Now that she had seen him suffer. . . . Now that he was suffering at her hands. . . . Her hands . . . She felt once more the stinging pain of Marc's hands on her neck. . . . She longed to kiss them. . . . She went up three or four steps. . . . But her pride flamed up again. She knew that other pride would be intractable. . . . No, she would not lower herself by pleading.

"It is you who are driving me away. Good-by, then! I will not come back unless you call me back. If it is for ever, for ever be it!"

She went downstairs again, with flaming cheeks which still bore the traces of hastily dried tears. Her goat-feet tapped their heels upon the polished stairs. She passed the concierge with her head high, without nodding. And in the streets she braved the curious glances cast at her gloomy, flashing eyes, from which a few belated tears were still dropping. She cared for nothing now. She walked on without knowing where she was going. Then she turned abruptly into the first hotel she saw—a dirty house of evil fame. She took a room without looking at it, paid in advance, before going up, and shut herself in. A life finished! . . . One more life! . . . Good God! Whenever would these lives come to an end?

X

Marc had not moved from the window-ledge, on which his head rested as on the block. The stroke of the ax would have been welcome. Not to be obliged to put his head back on his shoulders! If one could only cut off the memory of days and nights! But his brain was in a tumult. . . . Hatred and sorrow were intertwined as a convulsive couple. And his bristling flesh quivered with disgust. Not a thought of pity or pardon for her whom he had just driven away! Not an effort to understand! The outraged male saw nothing but himself and the injury to him.

A little footstep came pitter-pattering up the stairs. . . . Marc was on his feet in a moment. Vania was coming back. He must not see that anything was amiss. With hasty hands he dried his burning eyes, tidied up the things that had been knocked down in the brief tussle (he picked up the clasp of the collar); he opened the door on to the landing and leaned over the bannisters. Annette called from below:

"Are you there, Assia? I am bringing him back."

He answered:

"I am here. Thank you!"

"Is it you, my boy? Is she out?"

He answered:

"Yes."

Vania had reached the top of the stairs. She added:

"I won't come up. I am tired. Good-night, my boy."

"Good-night, mother."

He took Vania by the hand and went in.

He had to explain to the child that his mother would

not come back that night; she had gone away for some time. Vania was curious, and asked questions. When it appeared that he was satisfied, he would suddenly ask more questions which took Marc unawares. And you had to watch every word, for if you forgot and contradicted yourself, he reminded you of what you had said before. Marc also had much ado to give him his supper and put him to bed. With clumsy hands, he undressed the little chap, who kept saying in a tone of superiority:

"No, no, daddy, not like that! You don't know . . ."

And he prompted his father in the sacred rites of washing and the rest. These little worries served, at least, to distract Marc from his sorrow. And as to Vania, he was delighted at the novelty. Here they were, two men, alone in the house. It was an interesting situation.

The next day, Marc made him promise not to mention Assia's absence to his grandmother. He told the child that her journey was a secret, and the questions of Vania, who would not be content with vague explanations, gave him some trouble. He got muddled. Vania saw very well that his father was lying: something was being hidden from him; but he said nothing; he pricked up his ears and pointed his nose like a little dog; greatly puzzled by this mystery, he ferreted about without showing it. But he kept his word, he did not mention it to Annette, he did the same as his father: he lied; he even went so far as to tell her that his mother was very well and was doing this, that, and the other; he was pleased to deceive her; he was conscious of playing a part. What part? He did not know. But he was proud of it. He was quite a man. . . .

On the second day after Assia's departure, Marc received a long letter from her. Twenty pages, closely written, in pencil. She showed no desire to excuse herself or to return. But she felt that she owed it to him to tell

him exactly what had happened. She never asked herself how it would strike him as he read. She thought herself called upon to give him an account—her last account. With strange psychological immodesty, that disease of self-analysis by which Slav souls are possessed, she did not spare herself—she did not spare him—a single twist or turn of her conscience; she laid acts and thoughts stark naked before him. When the wording did not satisfy her, she crossed out, corrected, completed. She was determined not to spare herself. Never thinking that this was not to spare him either. She had to unburden herself. She felt greatly relieved afterwards.

As to Marc, he turned livid and his hands trembled as he glanced through this confession. He scarcely took time to turn the pages, his feverish eyes could not have read methodically; as ill-luck would have it, in this muddle of notes and corrections, through which, in spite of all, the rigid honesty of the woman who had betrayed him was shown, his eyes fell upon a few lines of a frankness so stripped of any rag of covering that he saw red; with a cry of rage, he rolled the twenty pages into a ball, which he crushed and tore with his fingers—he wished it was Assia's body—he flung it into the fire, and burnt it. . . . Afterwards, he regretted to his dying day that he had not read those pages to the end. Whatever he might do now, he would never know the truth. Assia would not confess twice.

On a sheet, separate from the letter, which had escaped the fire, she had made a list of linen and personal belongings which she asked him to send to the hotel. She offered Marc the alternative of fixing a day and hour when she might come and fetch them. No doubt there was a vague hope of meeting him in her mind. But Marc made it his business to tear it out. Hastily, he thrust all the things

she asked for into a trunk, adding, like a slap in the face, all the portraits of her he possessed. He sent it to her the same day, by a porter, under the name of Mme. Volkov. When Assia received it, the blood rushed to her forehead; she took her little case out of her bag, and out of the case a snapshot of herself and Marc, which they had had taken on a happy day, and which she always carried about with her; she tore it to pieces; let there be an end of it!—As she lay awake in the night, she got up and hunted, even in the dust under the bed, for the pieces of the puzzle; but she had destroyed it too well, it was impossible to reconstruct the picture! Yet she kept the pieces in an envelope, which she sealed to escape the temptation of opening it again.

Marc went to the Commercial Representation, to strike in the face the man who had defiled him. He had to hear that the cuckoo had gone back to the depths of the forest; and he was forced to feed alone for nights and nights on his unsatisfied thoughts of murder.

Meanwhile, Annette, whom the pair persisted in leaving in ignorance of what had happened, grew uneasy at never seeing Assia, and, in the end, she managed to drag the truth out of her son. It was in his flat, in his bedroom, after supper. The child slept—did not sleep—in the next room, a kind of alcove with no door. They had to speak low, their elbows on the writing-table, sitting side by side, in the circle of lamp-light. It did not take many words to make Annette understand. She cut his bitter confidences short; she could neither ask for, nor answer them here; she feared the child's ears; and she would not let Marc's lips utter the insulting words which he was longing to pour forth: the little that was left to be saved from the ruin must be saved. She suffered with her Marc, but she was a woman, and she suffered also for the other; before

she had heard her, she did not completely exonerate the man; one must hear both sides. Long since, she had feared such an end to this love; and now that the end had come, she felt more pity than reproach for the culprit—for the two culprits—the two victims. Naturally, she could not tell Marc what she thought. She put her arm round his neck. They were silent; but she felt Marc's cheek tremble. He feared nothing more than to show his weakness. He feared also that his mother might pity him while reminding him: "My poor child, didn't I tell you so! . . ." As soon as he was sure of his voice, he hastened to adopt a severe tone to discuss his domestic arrangements: Annette would take the child to live with her, Marc would not keep the flat; he would give notice the next day; and he would go to a hotel, provisionally; such furniture as he had would be stored meanwhile . . . There was no mention of Assia. It was Annette who reminded him that they must first consult her. Marc would not hear of it. He said harshly:

"She no longer exists."

Annette said, with a movement of her chin towards the child's room:

"She is here."

Marc drew himself up:

"She has no further claims on him."

"It does not lie with anyone to deprive her of them," replied Annette gently. "No more than anyone could have deprived me of my claims on you."

Marc would admit of no comparison:

"It is she, she herself, who has renounced them."

"No, my boy, let us not confuse matters; wife and mother are two things of a different order."

Marc, indignant, found himself up against the secret freemasonry of mothers:

"Then you take her part against me?"

"My boy, you are myself. But even one who offends us has rights."

"I do not recognize them," said Marc.

"You are in the fight," said Annette; "right is silent, there is nothing left but might. But you are not the stronger."

He protested:

"Is she, then?"

"Neither she nor you. But he." (Again she pointed to the child.)

"He is mine!" cried Marc. "Mine alone. Or I want nothing more to do with him!"

"He is his own," said Annette. "And I am his."

She had some trouble in ferreting out Assia's address. Marc did not give it to her, and she would not ask him for it, so as to leave herself free to act.

At last she discovered the vile lodging which Assia had chosen haphazard—what difference did it make? She was not particular; and the disgust which she nursed, at that time, for herself, for Marc, for all men, made no distinction between better or worse: the whole of life was vomit. Her mind was more disgusted than her senses by the idiocy of the adventure. Not her adventure (a sordid insignificant accident like being splashed in the streets) but the whole idiotic Adventure, without sense or sequence, of life. Yet that Adventure which she despised, Assia was not the woman to cast aside, half-way: whatever it might be, Assia would follow it out to the end.

She happened to be in her wretched room (she never stayed in it except to sleep) when Annette knocked at the door. Assia showed no pleasure at the visit. She had her hat on. She was just going out; she did not offer the only chair on which her things were piled. The dirty unswept room, the unmade bed, the filthy bedside table, its drawer half-open, a litter of things scattered in every direction, showed an overwhelming disregard of all material and social considerations. It gave Annette a lump in her throat. Without a greeting, refusing to see the outstretched hand, Assia drew back to let her in; and with her hands resting on the rickety table on which she was half-sitting, she stared at her visitor, frowning, with a fierce look. Annette was disconcerted for a moment. The words of sympathy froze on her lips. Assia said:

"Are you satisfied?"

She gave a cry:

"Assia!"

"What?" replied the other. "Hasn't everything happened just as you expected?"

She held out her arms:

"My daughter!"

Assia turned pale, her whole body quivered, her hard frozen expression was convulsed, and she burst into sobs. The effort she made to choke them back distorted her face to grotesque ugliness. But Annette never thought of finding it ugly; it was more moving to her than the most beautiful countenance. She threw herself upon Assia, and embraced her. Assia, her hands clenched on the table, made no resistance; her body was shaken with sobs; she sniffled, her cheeks dripping wet, her eyes and nose streaming. Annette kissed her cheeks, eyes, and nose. Assia, completely conquered, rested her heavy forehead on the mother's shoulder, wiping her face against the dress.

When the sobs were silenced, Annette sat down, finding room on the unmade bed, and held those clinched hands, the nails of which dug into her occasionally with starts of violence. They had not yet exchanged twenty words. Nothing had been said. All was said. Annette

solicited no confession; she was not one of those good women who need to question: "My poor child, how did it happen?" She knew too well; there is never anything very new or very appetizing about the tale for a woman who has lived. But Assia could not refrain from telling her. Willy-nilly one had to listen. And as Assia unfolded her tale, she recovered her nerve, and her silly pride of battle took possession of her once more. She made her confessions with an air of bravado; she did not excuse herself but merely stated the facts. Rightly or wrongly done, she had done what she liked. She had the right. (And she insolently challenged the mother's eyes.)

"The right to hurt those who love you?"

This remark made in an undertone, as if to herself, unhorsed the teller in her gallop. She stopped for an instant; then, as if she had not heard, she recovered her seat in the saddle, and continued on her course. Annette listened without flinching, even when her son was in question, save for putting her hand over Assia's mouth to stop the flow of uselessly brutal words, which the savage let out without reserve like the toads in the fairy tale:

"Don't soil your lips!"

"The dirt is in my heart, and I am spitting it out," said Assia, rubbing her mouth against the palm of Annette's hand. She was not the woman to deny that dirt is dirty; but she took an inverted pride in displaying it; that secret pleasure of so many women to-day in airing their turpitude, like the dirty rags which are hung out like banners in the streets of the South. It is an *Ersatz* for the old abuse of indecent confessions at the window of the complaisant, surpliced listener in the favoring shadow of the church. Annette said:

"Take in your linen! Don't let it drip on the heads of passers-by!"

Assia's open mouth did not finish the sentence she had begun. She was abashed and vexed. She was about to retort. Then she sniggered in spite of vexation and chagrin. And she said:

"Where do you expect me to put it?" (She waved her hand round the miserable room.) "I have no dirty linen basket."

"In the fire! In the fire!" said Annette. "And it wouldn't be a bad plan to throw everything here in with it."

"And myself too," said Assia, "if I had my way! But then I don't see why I shouldn't throw in the whole of Paris, as well!"

"Patience!" said Annette. "But let us look after ourselves first."

The conversation continued in another tone. Assia had given up the idea of finishing her story: the story did not interest Annette. Assia realized that Annette knew as much about it as she did. But she returned obstinately to the question of her rights in a free and loyal union. She might have lied and held her tongue. She did not lie, and she had not kept silent. And indeed why should she? She had acted within her rights.

"The strict right," said Annette, "is here, as it often is, supreme injustice. For it is the sin against love. And true love is the supreme law."

"Then why should he," persisted Assia, "he, your son, be the privileged party, to stand upon his strict right, against me, against my right, and my wish?"

"Because he is the weaker," said Annette.

"The weaker," exclaimed the other.

"Every man is," said Annette.

"Do you think so?" asked Assia, in surprise.

"You think so too."

Assia was silent. She reflected; she said:

"Yes."

She was astonished to find herself agreeing. She tried to defend herself. She went on:

"But is that a reason why the right of the weaker should have the best of it?"

"Yes, for my heart. And for yours. It is so. We are the mother. We must have pity on our child."

Assia's heart thrilled. She said no more that day. Annette got up.

"I came to speak about the other child."

"Which?" asked Assia. At that moment she thought only of the grown-up child.

"Vania," said Annette, in a tone of reproach.

Assia made a gesture of indifference. The passionate woman had no time now to think of the little one. She said:

"He is yours. Naturally you take him."

"Assia!" exclaimed Annette, "do you love him so little as not to claim your share?"

Assia's heart re-opened. She saw the child again, and suddenly hungered for him. Her eyes flamed. She held out her trembling hands:

"Give him to me! I want him!"

But almost immediately, tears came into her eyes, and her arms dropped in discouragement.

"What could I do with him here? No, keep him! You are better fitted to bring him up."

Annette asked:

"You have decided never to come home again?"

Assia cried:

"Never!"

All her rancor against Marc reared up again, like a serpent on its tail. She darted a look of hatred. It hurt Annette; but she thought:

"Whatever has he done to her?"

Assia felt that her dart, to reach Marc, had pierced the mother's heart. She quenched its burning point. And with gentler bitterness she said:

"I have no home. Nothing there is mine any longer."

"You choose to forget," said Annette, "but I do not forget that half of what is there is yours."

"I had nothing when I went there. I take nothing when I leave."

"If you go," said Annette, "I cannot agree that Marc should leave you without providing for your needs."

"In the first place," she retorted, drawing herself up stiffly, so as not to lose an inch of her stature, "in the first place, I am leaving Marc; Marc is not leaving me. In the second place, it is I who have kept the home going for the last three months. He was not even capable of earning his bread. Do you suppose that I could go and pick up his crumbs, now?"

Annette felt that she would get nothing from the proud creature, if she did not take some roundabout way. She said:

"Let's say no more about it! But is it just to make me pay for any harm Marc may have done you?"

That Annette, instead of accusing her, could, in compliance with Assia's rancor, accept the possibility of the blame lying with Marc, touched Assia and was like balm to her; she felt an impulsive rush of gratitude. She seized Annette by the shoulders:

"Who said that? No question of that!"

"Then, if you leave him, is that any reason why you should leave me?"

Assia squeezed her arms:

"I am not leaving you. I don't want to. I can't."

"Nor I either. I can't. nor do I want to."

"Is it true?"

Assia hugged her with transport.

"Then," said Annette, "let it be understood that my home is neutral ground! You will come whenever you like. And (I understand your pride, but you need not be proud with me; and even if it should cost you something, you owe me that sacrifice, at least) when it so happens (it might happen to any of us, nowadays) that you need a little butter on your bread—or bread without butter—come, quite simply, and eat with me."

"I will," said Assia. "But you are not much more sure of the morrow than I am."

"Well, let it be turn about!"

"Done!"

Assia was not deceived by the bargain; she felt its generosity. She devoured Annette with her burning eyes:

"Ah! what a pity that it isn't you I married!"

"Thank you!" said Annette. "I would rather not."

She went towards the door. Assia growled:

"If only one could never have anything to do with these men!"

"Yes," said Annette with teasing calm, "but that will hardly be to-morrow! In any case, it will not be for you."

"Why?" said Assia, flaring up. "I want no more of them. May the devil burn them, like the foxes in the Bible . . . ! And if I take up with them again, may my vineyard burn with them!"

"He who has drunk will drink," said Annette.

"In any case," said Assia, her hatred flaming up again, "not of your wine! I spit Marc out!"

And she spat.

Annette shrugged her shoulders, and went away. Assia impetuously ran down the stairs after her, nearly knocked her down, hugged her once more, and whispered:

"Pardon! pardon!"

Annette, leaving the house, said to herself with pity and irony:

"Only those who love can hate each other like this."

And raising her eyes to the Too-High, to the far off, the deaf and dumb, she prayed:

"Libera nos ab Amore!"

XI

Their life was cut in pieces—two for the disjointed couple, one for the child, and one for the mother of all three. It was pulled hither and yon, but it went on, for there was too much vitality in the pieces for it to stop. But the more life there is, the greater the capacity for suffering. The only one who was spared suffering was the child. He had no cause to complain of the change. In his grandmother's home he was the little household god: people seemed to be trying to make up to him by spoiling for something he was unconscious of having lost. But, like all children, he was too knowing not to have realized his interesting position from the very first, and not to take advantage of it. The real meaning of what had happened remained obscure to him; but one could not trust too much to that: if he did not know, he kept his nose to the wind; curiosity surpassed all other feelings in him. Not at all upset! It was a very amusing game: finding the scent. But one more game among many. He turned from one to another without following the hare. At long intervals his mother, or his father, came to see him, both equally busy and on edge, with knitted brows; they felt called upon to bring him presents, each in turn, and they kissed him much more heartily than when he lived with them. He let them do it: one must be nice to the grown-ups! He loved them as something belonging to him, puzzling, interesting, and not too bothering; but he did not want caresses much. But natural guile made him none the less skillful in exploiting their rivalry, which he sensed but did not understand. Both shut themselves in separately with Annette, and held long conversations. How-

ever much they lowered their voices, the little ear always managed to glean a word. And the word was put away in his cupboard, until he had a heap. Then he sorted, adjusted, and pieced together. But, God be thanked, he grew tired and left the task incomplete, incoherent, to seek some other amusement.

Annette had succeeded in preventing any official decree of separation between her two grown-up children at enmity. Divorce was senseless between two people neither of whom possessed any property, except the child (if that were an asset!) whom Annette, solving the difficulty, had taken to herself. And the procedure meant a waste of time, of which they had none too much in which to earn their bread, to say nothing of the disgusting intrusion of the prying eyes of society between their sheets. They tacitly agreed to do without it. They needed no social sanction to declare themselves separated. Annette was careful to avoid mentioning it. She had her own plans in reserve.

Meanwhile, she took good care that they did not meet in her home, and tried to seem to hold the scales equally between them. They must not fear that she was trying to influence them; she must let their evil passions expend themselves; so much the worse, if they led to deplorable errors for the sake of vengeance or the assertion of liberty! Marc and Assia would be the first to regret them, if no one called upon them to do so. There are faults from which a third person cannot save you; everyone must pay for his own experience with his own coin. Annette laid upon herself the difficult obligation of not seeing, not knowing, never appearing to interfere in their private life. Their pitiful disorganized life would have been ready for every folly, if they had not had to steady it the feeling of the presence (near or far, at their pleas-

ure) of this peaceful zone, where they would never be called upon to render an account before entering—where no one would try to detain them: "Come when you like! Go when you like! You owe me nothing . . ." Neither of them abused it. But they knew that they had this haven, where they could relax their strained nerves, and rest, for a while, their weariness of body and mind.

And this refuge would not have sufficed, if they had not had another curb which prevented them from abandoning themselves to the traitorous soul—poverty, hunger which gnaws at young stomachs, and leaves eager dreams, desire, and the ennui that engenders them no time to browse. Every morning they must start out again upon the hunt for a pittance, and every night fall into harassed sleep upon their hunger.

Assia was doing shorthand and typing of lectures and speeches, at top speed, five to seven hours of unrelaxed tension. It took all her indomitable energy, and her organism of tempered steel: hearing, fingers and brain. But how many failures before becoming perfect in her apprenticeship! She came away depleted, with sunken eyes, unable to think, words and printer's type filing across the screen at a triple gallop. . . . Stop! Stop! . . . It was enough to make one put a hole through the screen . . . Yes, a bullet in the temple. . . . She sold her revolver, so as not to risk being tempted. . . . And then (one dies, or gets used to it) she got used to it. After one becomes expert, with a quick and ready intelligence that is able to seize or make opportunities one can make an independent position for oneself, fairly well remunerated: one gets sent to congresses and missions abroad. But meanwhile, how many lean kine! . . . She was one of them, when she saw herself all skin and bone in Annette's bath. For Annette possessed that luxury, and Assia did

not hesitate to make use of it. It was the only thing she would accept. But Annette managed, when she had her safely there, to put into her, by consent or surprise, some substantial slice of bread and meat which she devoured while she protested that she was not hungry. Vania had seen through the game, and when his mother came as he was having lunch, he often held out a piece on the end of his fork:

"Open your mouth!"

Assia hesitated whether to laugh or get cross; but he looked innocent, she puckered her forehead, and opened her mouth: the morsel soon went down. Annette then pushed a chair against her legs; Assia found herself before a plateful, which she polished off while she said no. She had a wolf in her stomach. But one must pretend not to notice it. She pushed back the plate abruptly, and got up, irritated.

She persisted in her rancor against him whom she had deceived. No! not deceived . . . wronged. Not that either! She would not admit that he had a right. Offended? So be it! if he liked . . . She had avenged herself. Avenged herself for what? She wished that she might be asked, so that she could answer herself, and pour out the obscure and troubled thoughts beating at the door of her brain. She was even indelicate enough to let Annette perceive this rancor, in order to provoke a counter-attack. Annette took no notice. Never a word in reply. The fire went out for lack of draught in the chimney. Assia carried her undischarged resentment back to the dirty room in the hotel. (She persisted in not changing it.)

But, by a strange revulsion of the heart, she had never set foot in her office again, since she had separated from Marc; and she fiercely thrust the image of the other man

out of her mind. . . . However curious, even to immodesty, she might be to see into the depths of her secret feelings, she avoided examining herself upon this subject. It took a sudden fit of rage, on receiving a postcard from Djanelidze, to make the consciousness of the thoughts she kept under lock and key emerge from the closed door. The card—three insignificant words, "Arrived safely. Thanks"—was instantly thrown into the lavatory. She was bristling with dreadful hatred. And she perceived that her rancor against Marc no longer existed. It was all directed against the other. Making up her mind, at last, to examine the obscure feelings which she carried at the bottom of her sack, she found herself terribly deprived of all her arms, the grievances amassed against her companion. If till now she had claimed a credit in rancor against him, she had paid herself, they were quits. She admitted (what she had always refused to recognize) that she had betrayed him. Not so much in the way that he and others regarded it. The fact was much less important than the thought. The fact concerned herself, not him; it was for her to settle it, or not, with herself; her own contempt and disgust sufficed her to judge it, to judge herself; he had nothing to do with it. But the serious offense was that before the fact she had betrayed Marc for months in thought; she had been far from him, alien and hostile, for nights, nights when she lay beside him in the same bed. What was the fact of a moment's surprise, beside this long, persistent and deliberate treason of the mind, setting its teeth in silence? The fact had not so much sealed it, as broken the seal. It had even relieved Assia of that interior treason. By a paradox of nature, it was at the minute—that minute without yesterday or to-morrow—when Assia surrendered to the alien embrace, that she freed herself from her traitorous obsession,

and recovered her great, deep, faithful, and only love for Marc. But no one except herself could have understood it, and even Assia had fled from the thought. She had mobilized all her hard and evil forces of revolt to ward it off. But to-day the thought had entered the breach. Assia kept it to herself. There was no question of telling anyone or of trying to change anything. What was done was done; Assia had the pride to endorse the foolish bill, which she had signed, the consequence of her faults. But though for herself she did not in the least modify her view of the act which had provoked the rupture, love, which she no longer restrained, love for Marc, worked the miracle of teaching her to consider her own actions from Marc's heart, not from her own. And she espoused Marc's resentment against herself and Marc's suffering, which condemned her. Though alone, face to face with herself, she thought:

"It was my right." (She persisted in it.) "And it counts for so little! Wipe it out!"

But it was no longer her right to wipe it out. It lay with the other:

"Poor boy! . . . My great baby! . . . He hates me. I know him. He will never forgive me. . . . So much the worse for me! So much the worse for him! . . ."

This consciousness once acquired, she accepted failure with Asiatic fatalism. The sentence was just. She had made a mistake. They had both made mistakes. One must not sit brooding over sterile regrets, or remorse. He could forgive her, or not, as he pleased! As for her, she had forgiven him. And now, to start out for the rest of her destiny! She went as reporter with a deputation to a Congress in Norway. She had an incredible power of rebirth—new birth. She left the broken shell of the past behind her.

XII

Marc remained caught in it. He came of a race who keep their account books. They do not scribble the records on detached scraps of paper. They do not know how to forget.

It must be admitted that in the adventure he would have more merit in forgetting than the other. What she had left behind was the insult she had put upon him. Marc ruminated upon it bitterly. He could not succeed in rinsing his mouth clean of it. He long retained the feverish taste of it; he smelt it on his clothes; it seemed to him that wherever he went other people must smell it on him. For a long time he was subject to sudden fits which shook him with frenzy and pain, fits of jealousy, love, and wounded pride, intolerable memories. If he was in the streets, he hastened home, and hid himself during these crises. When Annette was aware of them, she never tried to force her way in; she withdrew by an instinct that made her guess that, as a woman, she participated in that which prolonged the sharp poison of his wound. And it was true. At such moments, his hatred for one woman extended to all women. The mere touch of a woman's hand, the slight contact of a woman brushing past him in the street, gave him a feeling of repulsion. Like the old painters of the damned, he could have seen under every dress the voracious jaws of Hell—the *pute bête* that gnaws and soils man's flesh. He was glad that his child was a son. He could not have borne with a daughter. But not an intonation, an imitation, unconscious or conscious (how can one tell with these young monkeys?) in Vania must remind him of her whose sub-

stance made up half of the child he had begotten. He drew back, or pushed the child brutally away. He would sometimes go several weeks without seeing him again.

In the obsession of that hatred upon which he fed, it was not only Assia's body that pursued him, that he pursued in thought in order to destroy it, it was her mind also. . . . Who can separate one from the other? For lovers, for haters, mind is flesh, mind may be smelt, chewed, touched, violated; one can tear it with the nails and teeth. . . . Marc was savage against Assia's. One after the other, he took up all her words, all her ideas, which, day after day, had crossed swords with his. He broke the steel; but he picked up the pieces to break them again; and he made his hands bleed with them. They were of hard steel, those ideas of Assia's! They defended themselves, they attacked him; even when broken, they went through his skin. They cut through all the better: they left filings in the wounds.

Marc raged against the dogmas of Russian Communism, with which Assia, without adopting them herself, had hostilely opposed him, in her rebellion against him, against his individualistic ideas (which, however, had once been her own), and against the life which he forced her to lead. As a result, he persisted, in order to feel himself further from Assia, in that individualism which she repudiated and decried. He sank himself up to the neck in it—till he could not breathe: for unless one could unseal the gate that opens into the long tunnel of mystic intuition, at the end of which one could see a few stars twinkling in the dark night, one was walled up in oneself, free from all outside. . . . Yes! But at what a price? Between the four walls of one's cell! The life of the mole that digs its gallery under the ground. But the mole comes out of it. When these intellectuals, these individu-

alists who called themselves independent, came out, what mole-hills did they build?

In order to strengthen a *Credo* (or a *Spero*) already shaken by too many doubts and experiences, Marc during these months renewed his acquaintance with Félicien Lerond, his former fellow student at the Sorbonne.

He had won for himself in scientific circles more renown than hard cash, by his researches upon the reactions of nitrified cellulose submitted to different radiations. He carried on his work apart not only from all action but from all social rumors, absolutely indifferent to all the tragedy—likewise to the comedy—past, present, and to come, of France, Europe, and the whole of humanity. It would have been revolting, if this indifference had not been extended to himself, his comfort, his success, and everything that concerned him, outside his work. And he performed that work under the most thankless conditions, with no subsidy from the State to purchase his instruments and to carry out his long and difficult experiments, upon a miserable pittance eked out by his own savings, in a basement room no wider than a cupboard, which he had to enter almost on all-fours, at the corner of a hovel made of lath and plaster which was crumbling away and letting in the icy wind and rain through the cracks. He had to scrape enough from his small salary to meet the most urgent expenses. He did so, without complaint or surprise, as if it were quite natural. Many other savants did the same, and had done so under every government, in all times. It would have seemed to them indecorous to make it public. It was a point of honor with them. They were like schoolboys, who despise those among them who whine and go and complain to the master. There is no merit in achieving results with the luxurious installations at the disposal of American experimenters!

While they envied them *in petto*, as they cobbled up their bric-à-brac with brass wire and pincers, they were proud of being French. The biggest joke was their attachment to the government; no more irritable opponents to any social upheaval could have been found; they held this attitude in common with all the worthy folk of the middle-class, who nowadays tighten their belts: industrious and exploited, they have nothing to lose by a change; and even the mention of Bolshevism or Communism nearly sends them into convulsions! Do not tell them that their work, under such systems, would certainly be better valued and more justly remunerated! They refuse to hear of it. Like prudish spinsters who always think that their virtue is threatened, they use their hands to protect their precious liberty. They never realize that the jewel is badly damaged! Every adventurer has been at it, both before and after the establishment of Sacred Democracy on paper. What is left is but what the pilferers have not cared to take. All that is left to these old maids and to these worthy folk is their honor. They value these leavings as the apple of their eye. They live more on fictitious non-existent goods than on realities. To keep up this illusion of unproductive property is the art of those who govern. Those whom they fleece are grateful for the eloquence with which they protect this hidden treasure (well hidden, nobody suspects its existence!), their liberty . . .

Free, free: upon that word, thieves and victims are in agreement.

Marc, who was not one of the least persistent in parading, before Assia, the liberty which he did not possess (he stiffened his neck, and decked himself out in it like a cravat), discovered its grotesqueness now that he saw

it round Félicien's neck, and realized that it was choking him.

"Silly idiot!" he cried, "there's a lot to be proud of! For all you get out of your liberty!"

The other looked at him with angry eyes. Then he assumed an air of dignity:

"It is not a question of profit. There are other values in the world."

"What are they? Your beautiful soul? It's a worn-out hag! Do you still smile at it before your looking-glass? The world doesn't care a straw about it!"

"I don't understand you," said Félicien, placid, but pained. "I have always known you jealous of your independence. Whom or what have you got a grudge against now?"

Marc felt ashamed; it occurred to him that his aggressive tone was the ricocheting of Assia's stones aimed at himself; he blushed; then he was seized with an inclination to laugh. He was avenging himself for his defeat, but his victim was a caricature of himself. Recognizing the hidden motives of his animosity did not make him more indulgent. On the contrary, he persisted in trying to prove to Félicien that his pretended liberty was worth little or nothing. With signal bad faith, he reproached this ascetic of science, married to poverty like St. Francis, for not coming out of his cell, away from his disinterested labor, to go to war against society and condemn social iniquities. Félicien listened, placid, astonished, round-eyed, as he polished his eye-glass. He was gentle, gentle, very gentle. Great clumsy hands, skillful in manipulating his phials, a thick-set body, awkward gestures, and short wobbly legs, head over tail: seated Thought. He answered:

"Eh! What could I do? What could anyone do?

I'm not Einstein or Langevin. Even they, what good are their protests! They would do much better to stick to science. Nothing can compensate for every hour they waste away from science. Science is our home. One must stay in one's home."

"Sweep in front of your house, at least, as the man of Weimar said!"

"No! Can you picture me sweeping the street? I have quite enough to do keeping my operating instruments clean, and verifying my weighings. Every man to his trade! If everyone stuck to it, the world would be none the worse!"

"That's what the sharks do."

"The little fish too."

"And you think it's right?"

"The world is like that. I didn't make it. We aren't the ones who will change it."

"You make it worse. Your science is at the service of the sharks. You are the accomplice of the assassins. What do you care that your study of organic nitrified derivatives and the effect of radiations upon them serves to elucidate the question of the stability and preservation of gunpowder? All the materials necessary for destruction, its explosives, its asphyxiating gases, its yperites, tolites, melinites, phosgenes, and arsines, it's you idiot-geniuses that furnish them."

"The same products that can destroy can cure or serve mankind. Factories of dyes, perfume, or pharmaceutical products. It is not our fault if good and evil are the two sides of the same coin. It is a fact. We verify, explain, and proceed to analysis and synthesis; it is not for us to take sides."

"Impassive like Nature? Spawn of monsters, monsters yourselves . . ."

"Go to it! The hydra of Lernæa."

"You are its heads."

"And it would just suit you to be Hercules?"

"Ah! why haven't I his biceps! All that counted in man's history, his reason for living, was to conquer Nature. But nowadays the conqueror is conquered. You betray. You should all be stuck on a gibbet."

"Would you destroy science?"

Marc said, with fury:

"It is the whole of civilization that must be destroyed."

"Damned Bolshie! Go to Moscow!"

"And why not?"

He bit his tongue. He raged at what he had said. But he would not go back on it. He said:

"Make a clean sweep."

Félicien, mocking, still placid, piled it on:

"Creation must be done over again. False start! Begin again . . ."

"Not I!" said Marc. "Once is enough. To hell with it!"

He slammed the door as he went out. Félicien jumped and swore:

"Here, damn you! Do be careful! You'll smash my crockery! This shanty can hardly hold together!"

The quiet man flew into a fury in his turn. By reaction, Marc was freed from his. He laughed:

"He loves his phials better than mankind."

But he was not proud of the part he played. He had been whipping himself on another's backside. And, to crown all, he had consented to use Moscow's canes for the purpose. . . . He started with indignation:

"Never! Never! They shan't get me!"

Two little working girls who were passing called back at him:

"They've had others!"

He turned round, disconcerted. They were a long way off by now, they were hurrying, but as they went, one of them turned her neck round like a stork, and put out her tongue at him:

"And they'll get you!"

XIII

"They shan't have *me!* . . . Nor will you either, little females (cursed be the female smell! All the rest of my life will not be long enough to wash me clean of it! . . .) neither you nor the big males of Moscow. . . . I won't surrender. Like the old Guard. And I won't die. . . . But I won't say the Maréchal's word to you! But to those neuters of thought, those savants who proudly, stupidly practice 'science for science's sake,' careless of the results to humanity . . ."

And as luck would have it, stopping before a bookstall, grumbling to himself, he turned the leaves of a book signed by a famous bacteriologist until his ever roving eye caught the ridiculous portrait painted by the savant of himself engaged in creating an infectious disease all complete. So far, alas! the microbite had not managed it; he deplored that he had not yet succeeded in *"brilliantly filling up this lacuna":* to transform a saprophytic microbe into a pathogenic microbe. He consoled himself with the thought, that he had, at least, achieved the brilliant success of restoring virulence to pathogenic microbes that had lost it, and even of raising that virulence to a degree of activity hitherto unknown. He was well pleased with the graduated system of cultures and slow and progressive inoculations, by means of which he had achieved this exploit, passing from a young mouse to a full-grown mouse, a young guinea-pig to one full-grown, then to a sheep, then to a dog—to be continued in our next—Man, to-morrow!

Marc burst out laughing. . . . Now then Molière! And what are you waiting for, Jules Romains? . . . Then

he remembered that in these dark days, when war by gas was suspended over Europe, not one of these great intellectuals, even those who hated most, would consent to subordinating the researches of science to the public safety. Science *über alles!* And his rancor flared up again. . . . It is not enough that these maniacs of intelligence entrench themselves behind their disinterestedness. They are saving their souls? I am glad of it! They are ruining my life. I would rather that they should ruin their souls and save my life, and the lives of others. . . . They have misused their powers. They will have to render us an account, and the account will be heavy. The proletarian society of the future will have the right to put them in chains—or at least under the control of a Council of the Community. And perhaps executions of laboratories will be imposed, and interdictions on researches. Why not? *Primum vivere.* . . . The Dictatorship of Public Safety over science. . . .

Marc was once more on the road to Moscow. He swore. . . .

"No, no, and no! . . . I mean to safeguard my individualism, but not by shutting myself up in it like a tower. . . ."

Félicien's tottering tower, with his phials and furnaces. . . . He recalled it with Assia's cruel smile. . . . But the smile was aimed at himself. Irritated, he brushed it away with the back of his hand, like a fly. . . . The fly came back. It came and settled on his mouth. . . . His mouth smiled bitterly at the vanity and inanity of this individualist, isolated from the rest of mankind. It would make no difference that individual salvation was a sin of selfishness, if only it were possible. It was not possible: only nonsense. How save a branch of a tree if the tree is condemned? Though it might remain green when

the tree dies, it is only a last flicker, it will soon wither too. Marc up against his *self*, and sounding it, recognized that that self owed its sap and existence to the channels rising from the *self* of the community. To save oneself, one must save the community, or perish with it. But the geniuses, in the nations and ages that die? Yes, they are the bottle thrown into the sea, the last appeal when all is lost! And even so one must have an appeal to throw in! I, Marc, what have I to say that is worthy and capable of surviving. And if I have nothing (if I have nothing yet. . . . Later, who knows? . . .) is it not my only duty to fight, till the last moment, for the sinking ship?

There is no excuse for standing apart from those who fight but genius or sanctity, which are not within the reach of the generality of men; and they imply a much more difficult combat, by transposing the combat to the plane of eternity; complete renouncement and sacrifice are required.

"Beyond my strength," said Marc. "I must will only what I can do. But I must will all that I can do, and I do will it. Since I want to save my branch of liberty, I want to save the tree. Since I want to save the tree I want to defend its roots against the gnawers. I want to act, and expose myself. Those who aspire to live peacefully within the shelter of their padded minds are cowardly, selfish little bourgeois. And the fine intellectual reasons with which they cover up their cowardice make them still more contemptible. The only true individualism is that which is always ready to take risks, that which pays; that which loses in the battle, if it must. Why not? I am only a pawn on the chess-board. Others will fight after me. Our pass-word is never to give in—to the last!"

To prove to himself, against Assia's insulting reproach which still pursued him, that his individualism was capable of action, and that he was not branded with sterility, he looked for groups with which he could associate himself. Among the causes whose banners floated in the wind (he could have done very well without the banners—he mistrusted flags, but men must have tinsel) there were three which at once appealed to Marc's activity: the cause of Independence of Spirit—that of Peace—and that of Europe. They had in their favor that they had been tracked and persecuted during the war. Like Forain's Republic, they had been *"beautiful under the Empire."* But what remained of their flower? Marc, suspicious, but curious, went to see. He found them in very bad company. The fair ladies, once forsaken, had now a numerous following. Marc forced himself to overcome the repugnance which he felt at approaching Penelope's suitors—adventurers young and old, who had installed themselves in the lady's alcove if not in her bed, which attracted them less than her table. In the first rank were old professional politicians, whose invertebrate suppleness always succeeded in wriggling into parties of idealist action and immediately impregnated them with their own odor of stale fish.

To right and left, on every side there arose from the ground those molehills of the Internationalists of the mind, the Pen Clubs, and Congresses of the Inkpot, Intellectual Coöperations, and towering above these mounds the "Permanent Committee of Letters and Arts of the League of Nations." There was no question of scaling those summits, in the ranks of those Illustrious. Even supposing that the place had not been well guarded, as it was, it was too restful; the higher one climbs, the less one acts. The "Permanents" acted not at all: their seats

were too comfortable! And Marc had remained too long, against his will, with his backside stuck to a chair; he needed to prove his existence to himself by moving. He was tormented by an itch for action. It was below, in the plain, that he had more chance of meeting men in action.

He met some, in serried ranks, who bestirred themselves, not without fuss, in their newspapers and international banquets. But it was on the subject of their professional interests, to safeguard their authors' rights, their editions, translations, their bookseller's propaganda: they exchanged their cassia and senna. We cannot blame them; their desire to be read and sold is quite legitimate: one must live! But our Marc, less indulgent, could not see the necessity. He was not interested in idealism with a "yield." Let him who will think of the spoil when the battle is over! But now it is beginning. One must seek risks, not profits. It did not take him long to discover that this exclusive preoccupation blocked action in his companions. It forced them to such caution that they accepted everything, and a bit over, from the world, including cudgels for the backs of others and the confiscation of liberty, so long as the world accepted them and paid well for their productions. It was marvelous how these sharp-eyed and professionally expert men were struck with instantaneous blindness when it was a question of seeing the social crimes of which the culprits were "*the Amphitryon with whom one dines*"—or with whom one aspires to dine—the French masters of power, dispensers of cash and honors, and the dictators who owned a good table. A very small number of writers—always the same ones—were sufficiently lacking in appetite to protest. But their protests, thin as themselves and monotonous, to which Marc added his, woke no echoes; they were repeated every week, with the crimes they denounced. In the end, they passed unnoticed. Or the good public grew bored, saying: "What, again!"—and stopped subscribing to papers in which the rain fell. They wanted barometers set at fair, and frogs on the ladder. They preferred Clément Vautel.

Marc himself became infected with the boredom arising from this rain of protests without action. They ended by becoming a funk hole for conscience, a side door one slipped through to escape the dangers of action, or a painful confession of impotence. When he had signed a dozen, his heart failed him, and his angry hand broke his pen on the *M* of his signature. And instead of his name he wrote the word of five letters. Manure is needed on that barren field of "protestants!"

No manure was required to nourish the mushrooms in the bed of pacifism, which had sprung up suddenly in a night. Marvelous yield! But yesterday peace was banned. To mention it was a crime of treason. And to-day it was quite the style. All were hurrying to stick the flower in their mouths, like the cigarette girls of Seville—or into the point of their pens. These doves of the Ark came from afar! There were some who ten years before had been crows of the battlefields croaking to demand the heads of premature, unlicensed pacifists. If you had expressed surprise, no doubt they would have replied that there is a time for everything; yesterday, war; to-day, peace. Marc, whose native "inopportunism," inherited from his mother, suspiciously smelled out all "opportunism" at twenty paces, observed with troubled eyes the sudden rush of these strange "guardians of the peace." Where did they get the pass-word? . . . He did not have to seek long. The peace, officiously encouraged by State, Church, and University, was a right-minded peace:

—the peace that oils the mouths of those curés whom the great masters of industry have established in their churches, built like a porter's lodge at the gate of their factories, opposite the bar and the brothel, so as to sanctify their exploitations, and instill into the exploited, together with syphilis and alcohol, evangelical resignation; the peace of signed and legalized robbery; the profit-making peace of the treaties; the peace of the profiteers of peace (profiteers of yesterday's war, and of tomorrow's—they are the same people). Poor men are not of the confraternity. They have nothing. They are had. They are given preaching instead of profits: the God of the rich is always ready to let fall upon men with empty stomachs his manna of peace, idealism and love. Old Jesuses of the Palais-Bourbon throw out their line for fish, while reciting their twisted Sermons on the Mount; they exhort fishes and fishers to love each other, the despoiled to sacrifice their possessions for the fair sake of Peace. As to preaching such sacrifice to those grown fat on the spoils, nothing doing! . . . These old Jesuses had made the war—"Say no more about it! What is done is well done. We will do better. . . . Peace on earth to men of good will! (The will is good when it leads to success!) And blessed be the established order!"

It was a question of convincing the conquered. More rhetoric was required; the conquerors' idealism no longer sufficed. Each of the conquered had his own, which was not written in the same key: they were out of tune. To reëstablish harmony, other strings had to be played on, those of common fears and interests. Aptly named, *Pan-Europa* had come to reëstablish harmony among the big fish: for it is they that set the pitch. They are the masters of the river; it is to their advantage to combine to defend themselves against those who threaten their larder. The

gigantic shadow of the Red Kremlin spreading over the plain of Europe was to them a Bogey-Man, skillfully exploited by the masters of the *Pan-European* game—the fine young aristocrat with the cold glance of the *samuraï*, and the unfrocked Socialist, the cunning old mystic of the Quai d'Orsay. They hastened to assemble under their crook, in the same park, the flocks of conquerors and conquered, to guard their wool from the common rival: the Union of Proletarian States, seated in the saddle, one leg over Europe and the other over Asia, like a new Golden Horde threatening to bestride the world. Perhaps the world—that world whose back was already bent beneath the weight of a privileged class—would have asked nothing better than to change its rider, or even to leap to the saddle behind the Golden Horde, had the world known that the Horde would help it recover its own land. But that was just what it must not know. It did not know. That was managed. The millions of fleece-bearers, well coached by a "*Friends of the People*" Press, gathered terrified around their shearers and opposed those who were trying to deliver them. Fear and foolishness can change sheep's hearts into lion-hearts, when the two notes are skillfully played upon. The engineers of *Pan-Europa* had no trouble in draining the scattered stagnant waters of empty idealisms, and they were working to gather them together for a Crusade of God and Dividends against the expropriatory Materialism of Moscow. Princes of the Church, and Barons of the Forges, pastors, rabbis, and swastikas, Christ, Krupp and Creusot, seemed to be in agreement. Hermit Bernards were not lacking. One of Marc's old friends, plump Adolphe Chevalier,[1] who was in Briand's suite at the League of Nations, had become

[1] See "The Death of a World."

one of the canopy-bearers of *Pan-Europa*. Of course, he was also an apostle of National Defense, of a Nation armed from the cradle to the grave, males and females, the whole herd incorporated. The right-minded press indefatigably reproduced his luxuriant locks, like a pianist's, and his vulgar countenance, like that of an old lady trying to look like Robespierre.

The prosperous face of Véron was seen less, or rather not at all. One might sooner have seen his quick stubby hands: they wasted no time; they came and went, they went straight, but zigzagging between France and Germany, gripping business realities here and there, every time. At the moment, he was engaged in the cabals of the Franco-Germanic International Industrial Organization with Hugenberg's Steel Helmets. It was Jean Casimir who informed Marc; for how could the poor devil, in his hole, ever have heard of it? His ideas of the antagonism of the forces of peace and the forces of war were still of the simplest. Jean Casimir enlightened him on one of his flying visits to Paris. He had retained his strange intermittent fidelity to Marc; like a little prostitute who returns once a year to her first lover, out of superstitious devotion and an impulse of tender remembrance, seasoned with mockery. There was also, in his present return, a curiosity which he took care to conceal. He was, of course, aware of Marc's conjugal misfortune; he had been one of the first to foresee and look out for it; and he was not sorry to note the traces of it on his companion's face; it was one more spectacle. Marc knew his Sainte Luce well enough to drop the curtain before the play; he showed an impassive countenance. But he gained nothing by it. Sainte Luce knew how to peep through the holes in the curtain, and said to himself: "The Marcassin is hit!" The excited interest shown by Marc

in political matters seemed to him (as indeed it was) a distraction from torments whose depths, however, he did not suspect; for Assia was not all: Marc was burning with the fire of an unsatisfied soul, struggling to solve the enigma of its destiny. If he had chosen, Jean Casimir could have given Marc news of his absent wife; for he had had some quite recently through the embassy of Stockholm, whose agents had enriched Assia's secret dossier with absurd notes. With the malicious roguery of a teasing girl, not cruel, but avenging herself for what is hidden from her, he made a passing allusion to the pleasure a friend had had recently of meeting "Mme. Marc Rivière on her travels." Marc never flinched, he waited. Jean Casimir watched Marc's nail scratching the cover of a copy-book; he waited too, smiled—and went back to politics. It took Marc some time to recover himself; his ears buzzed; he would have liked to bring Jean Casimir back upon the other scent. But it was too late; and he plunged once more into conversation upon those matters of money, trickery, and power—those politics which he hated.

Jean Casimir was for the moment—not for long—attaché of the embassy in Berlin. He had reason to be well informed of the Franco-Germanic political or financial cabals: he played his part in them. Like a good little fox which has smelled out the direction of the stronger scent (what stuffed-up nose can possibly have said that money has no smell?), he had chosen the more real of the two powers: the State and Money. He served the great barons of industry, under the livery of the embassy. Even his ambassador knew nothing of his maneuvers. He had two simultaneous French policies, not exactly opposed but superposed: one for show, one below ground. Jean Casimir moved constantly from the surface

to the bed of the river, swimming from top to bottom like a minnow. What guided him, as usual, was not his own interest (though he was quick enough at snapping up; but he had such a small appetite—a nibble at the fly's head was enough for him), it was the game. He would have been a king of gamesters but for one fault, which was not a small one—it amused him less to play his own cards well than to peep at his adversary's hands —and another, which was worse—the tip of his tongue was a little too long. He was too fond of sharing a laugh with a lone companion, either in bed, or tête-à-tête with the first casually met person whose physiognomy appealed to him. Yet he knew better than anyone how much is paid for ears. He had once been, for a time, controller of those of a whole battalion of *belles-de-nuit*. But he had too much wit for his own good. He depended on his wits to repair the damage his wit did to the game. And after all, what interested him in the game was not the stakes but his own amusement. For who won or lost, in the end, he did not care a pin! There were even certain days when he would not have been sorry to make those lose for whom he was supposed to win. . . . "Heads or tails! As I feel disposed!" . . . The fact is that, like many of his masters, the *condottieri* of imperialist finance, he was of mixed breed, with the viewpoint of a freedman of the Roman Empire. His roots did not hold to the soil.

When Marc began to play on the violin of European peace, Jean Casimir's girlish tongue began to dance. He was amused at the disorderly intrusion of this grasshopper into the wasps' nest. This poor chap who imagined that he was working for the peace of the world!

"Peace, old chap, is no longer made by the press, nor by speeches, nor in the Forum, nor in Parliament, nor in

the interviews of ministers, nor the conferences of diplomatists, nor even at the front of armies. That belongs to the past. It is out of date! Peace and war are in the hands of those who hold the purse-strings: a dozen. 'Your money or your life!' They do not even offer you the choice. They will make it for you. Your life or death are in our hands, my dear boy. When we choose!"

It was more than enough to make Marc fly out. Such fatuity! . . . even though he knew it was ironical. . . .

"When you choose? . . . When you like? Who are you? Who? You 'the Flea'? You can do nothing. You want nothing . . ."

The Holy Flea was not susceptible. He wanted nothing, at the moment, but to annoy Marc. He was pleased with his success.

"The flea in your ear. I'm going to put it there. Just keep still! . . ."

He unwound his ball of confidential information. Marc sulkily let him go on. At the third phrase he had pricked up his ears. At the tenth his coat bristled. He yapped. He punctuated these indiscreet revelations with furious and stupid (in the classic sense) growls. He hung upon the lips of the indiscreet Mercury who was betraying his master's tricks. Jean Casimir complaisantly unveiled real politics for him—the politics of those who pull the strings of public opinion and government: Royal Dutch, Standard Oil ("Do you like oil? They have put some everywhere. . . ."), the Committees of the Forges or Collieries, Skoda, Creusot, etc. He told, with a wealth of detail (this arrant Scapin forgot nothing!) the dates, figures and places of the secret treaties, the conventions which, unknown to them, bound the States, with the complicity of their valets—valets of the press, or the government. He counted up on his finger-tips the great

newspapers which had sold themselves (when and for how much?) to one or another of these ogres, and told of the control exercised by their agents over sales in kiosks, bookshops and newspaper stalls, of periodicals, pamphlets, and all printed thought. As he went on Marc gradually sank in the pond. Free thought was foundering. Nothing was left of it but a few gurglings that made bubbles on the surface of the slimy water. He struggled, he protested, he contested. But he felt himself that it was only for form's sake. At each attempt at denial, Jean Casimir nailed him down with a fact, to which he could oppose nothing save a repeated "I won't have it!" like a child dressed, undressed, whipped, wiped, and handled by grown-ups, who knows that grown-ups will not worry about his wishes.

Overwhelmed, he cried, at last:

"Then, all we are doing, everything we can do, is useless! There is nothing left but to blow our brains out. . . . . If before, or at the same time, we could blow them up too!"

Jean Casimir, satisfied with the effect he had produced, graciously held out a pole to the drowning man:

"Who knows? Who knows? Perhaps it will come sooner than we expect. We must not despair of the imbecility of the strongest. . . . Naturally, if it depended on you and your party, the platonic lovers of beautiful Europa, beautiful Europa would be in the lake or in the Euxine: the bull is carrying her off. . . . But, thanks be to God, there is the bull, the idiot! (Did you ever see a bull fight?) And (the mercies of God are infinite) instead of one bull, there are two, three, half a dozen: there is the white bull, the black bull, and the red bull, there is the Union Jack, the Swastika, the Star-spangled Banner, and there is (salute!) the Blue-White-Red of

the tricolor swan of Saint Point, M. Alphonse de Lamartine, which floats over the cellar of milliards of our Bank (I say 'ours,' you see!) and over the Empire of our Republic, where the sun never sets. . . . All these bulls fight and bang up against each other, heads down. Are there not two great buffaloes in our enclosure, fighting with their horns: financier capital and industrialist capital! Each supported by other beasts outside the ring: London or New York. And all want to take all there is to take, but each one wants to do it by his own means, and for his own privileged profit. The policies of the thieves, stocks and shares, crash against each other on the Bourse and on the green baize of the States—even, when possible, on the red tables of battlefields. So, the game remains a draw, and the people who are the stake have the benefit of an hour or two's respite. Take advantage of it! Browse in the fields meanwhile, with last year's calves."

"I'm not hungry," said Marc, with a gloomy air. "How absurd to fatten oneself to-day, so as to be eaten to-morrow."

"Who knows? Who knows? It may last our time."

"To last without action is not living."

"There's always room at the roulette table. I put down my stake, I play, therefore I live."

"And what can you stake? If finance has taken everything, what room is there for politics?"

"It is the subtlest game. Politics holds the balance. It hesitates, wavers, and bets on both sides; it watches and waits to see which will be the stronger. The game consists in getting on the stronger side one minute before it becomes the stronger. So one seems to walk before it, and the blockhead is taken in. For instance, if the scale of high finance is the heavier we play for Franco-

Germanic reconciliation. If it is the scale of industry, we denounce German armaments, and arm ourselves. We drive disarmament and armament at once, with equal strength; both horses are always ready in our stables: Maginot and Briand—war, peace. Our horses rear and bite each other; but that is chiefly for the gallery. They are old well-trained cockaded horses, all very proud of belonging to the France stable. They each wait their turn. And whatever number is drawn we lose nothing."

"Because you have nothing left to lose. Whatever game you play, you are playing the game of others."

"In this world below, what counts, old chap, is not what one is, but what one appears to be."

"For you, the shadows! Not for those masters of high finance, whose mask you have just lifted for me. They, at least (I understand them!) would rather be than seem."

"And so everybody is satisfied."

"I'm not. I would like to see the lot of you, on both sides, go bust together."

"It will come. I've told you so. Don't get impatient."

"If you are so detached from what is to come, why don't you do all you can to make it come?"

"I have only to do what I am doing. The old ship makes a show, but she's leaking; and we gnaw the keel!"

"Then wouldn't it be better to pass to the other ship, that of the Reds, and clear the sea of the wreckage?"

"The International of Moscow?" said Jean Casimir, drawing back. "No, no, my boy! I am not tempted. That's not for me. The game they play is too serious. There's no pleasure in it! And I don't like promiscuity."

"Yes, you would rather sit among the croupiers!"

"I can't help it. I prefer well-bred robbers. I gnaw the old ship with them. We love her, you see!"

"In that case, love her well! Gnaw and gnaw away! And go to the bottom with her!"

He had need, that night—he was choking—to go and beg his mother's breath. He had not been near her for weeks. He did not want her to see his defeat; he had said to himself: "To save myself unaided—to show *them*. . . ." (Whom? Annette? Or that other, far from Paris, who corresponded with Annette?) He wanted to show her whom he had banished from his thoughts (but his thoughts cheated him) that he could do without her, that he carried on his life, his faith and his action, without her. This secret defiance, which kept him taut, had saved him from destruction. To let himself be destroyed would put Assia in the right. But that night he could bear it no longer; he needed to rest his head on a woman's breast and share with a woman's hands the too heavy weight of his rancors and fury. He unburdened himself of all that he had just heard. Annette showed no surprise. Her friendship with Timon had taught her. She knew that politics is a puppet show in which the mouth-pieces of the White House, the Quai d'Orsay, Wilhelmstrasse or Chequers are the puppets in the hands of the great Capital; and the strings are entangled: for the great Capital is a giant with several heads, which are rivals; but whatever head or hands may hold the string, the master of politics is Money. What did the master want to-day? She was interested in Marc's fresh information, but she received it with a coolness that disconcerted Marc, and revolted him. She perceived it, and reminded him, with a smile, that it was nothing new to her! Throughout the war, while the nations were tearing at each other, had not the Money of the Franco-German Forges, which fattened on the carnage, imposed on both States, and the Chief Headquarters of both armies, the obligation of

religiously respecting their hen that laid the golden eggs, the Briey basin? And the contract had been loyally respected on both sides, when all other treaties of sovereigns, ministers and States, and the Laws of Man and God were no more than scraps of paper. If the world's opinion, though warned, had feigned deafness to accept it, what more would it not accept? They could do as they pleased now! Annette expressed ironical surprise that the holders of almighty power should show such moderation! Marc did not like irony, except when he dealt in it himself. He said:

"Stop! . . . If you have always known all this which I just learned to-day, how have you accepted it?"

"I do not accept," said Annette. "That is the reason of my existence."

"What do you mean?"

"I accept nothing, my dear boy. What is, is. And I am."

"What are you? What am I? It is not enough not to accept. What do we want? Where can we turn? Towards those who stake on peace, or those who stake on war? It is the same thing on both sides. On one side Europe (or that's saying too much—our West) gains perhaps from twenty to thirty years of armed peace. But when one sees what is under it, what the rest of the world pays and will pay for it, can we, can I, associate myself with it? These peacemakers, peace is not their object. It's money. Money wants peace to-day, war to-morrow. There is no peace."

Annette said:

"There never is. War is always hidden under the mask. And that is their civilization. Flowers cover the grave. The worthy folk ask no more. So long as they see the flowers and not the grave! Those who dig the

grave are not their enemies; but rather those who force them to see it! And let them come to it as late as possible. Let them still cherish the illusion that the gravedigger has forgotten them. And so they live. Peace, their peace, is the little wall round the cemetery, which they cannot see over; they do not want to see those who are being laid in the earth on the other side—the exploited, the oppressed, who pay, as you say, for the good life or luxury of others."

"Then, what can we do?"

"Carry on *our* peace, and *our* war. They and we call nothing by the same name."

"I will climb over the cemetery wall."

"I have scratched the wall with my nails; and through the chink, I see daylight on the open fields."

"No, I see nothing, I don't want to see anything, if all the others do not see with me. I will be blind with all, or share the light with all!"

Annette kissed his eyes.

XIV

It was at this time that I first met Marc. I was on a passing visit to Paris, staying at a little hotel near the Sorbonne. I had not been living in France for three or four years. Marc had seen my recent book on Gandhi, at his mother's. It engrossed him. A gleam of light was showing at the end of the path, in the darkness of the forest. He was wondering if that path might be his. He was hesitating at the cross-roads. He came to see me one morning in the little salon of the hotel, where people were coming and going every moment. He could not make up his mind to speak. I looked at this young wolf, lean and anxious, his nervous hands, and wild eyes, beautiful light eyes that seemed gloomy. I took him into my room, still undone, the bed not made, and everything in disorder. There was no question of apologies. The fine gloomy eyes had lightened. The mistrust with which he was armed gave place, without transition, to naïve gratitude. And he began to speak at once.

It was not the first time that I had been consulted on the itinerary of life: I was a kind of travel agency; and I had directed more than one young man or woman either towards Asia or towards Moscow: for the pupils of more than one reflected the light of one of the stars that were rising in the East. But I saw more than one star in the young wolf's eyes; their broken fires clashed, they went out, and shone forth again; heavy clouds passed and repassed before them. While he precipitately affirmed in feverish jerky outbursts, seeking guidance from my eyes, his agreement with the doctrine of heroic passivity and non-violence practiced by Gandhi, I realized the violence

of this nature, and of its contradictory passions, and I saw that it was not attracted by the peace of love, but by its combats—and not by the repose in faith, but the fever of acting according to its own truth. Now, he did not know that truth, he was seeking it, confused by its diverse ways, all his young body tense, as if pulled in many directions. And I told him so: for he was one of those young men (it was obvious, at the first glance) who cannot cheat themselves to create an illusion. And yet, they need an illusion, like everyone else. But when they have acquired one, it weighs upon them like remorse; they cannot digest it; they cannot breathe, till they have spewed it out. I told him so:

"*Your* truth is *your* nature. Do not betray nor do violence to your nature by espousing that of another! You are not made for marriage." I saw his mouth contract. "You have quite enough to do to espouse yourself! You have in you man and woman, pro and con, yes and no, the passion for and the aversion to violence, the exigencies of an irreducible ego and the need for sacrifice. Reject nothing! Keep everything! Suffer, seek the finest harmony, that which is the black honey of discords!

"'*Εκ τῶν διαφερόντων καλλίστην ἁρμονίαν . . .*"

"It is easy for you to say so! What if the harmony is impossible? . . . If it is so to me? . . ."

"With a brave and sincere nature, such as yours. . . ."

"What do you know of it? . . . What do I know of it myself?"

"I know it for you. . . . With you, if such a duel of the soul is possible, if it lasts between the forces, between the interior gods who wrap themselves in cloud and lightning, it is because such an hour is necessary in the great combat, the Iliad which humanity is writing and fighting.

And the more painful the blows given and received, the more the heroic necessity of the combat is proved."

"But if I die in it?"

"Die, my boy! *Stirb und werde!* Forgive me for saying *tu!*"

"No, I beg you! I thank you for it. . . ."

With an impulsive gesture, he put his hand on my knee, and squeezed it with his firm and tender fingers, then withdrew it, as if ashamed. . . .

"I am quite willing to die. I am not afraid. I ask nothing more! . . . But I would not like to die uselessly. Not for myself! Not for myself alone! Not to save myself, like those selfish cowards of religion and thought! . . ."

And I conceived a great love for him. . . . I took his hand:

"Do not fear! The hour will come. You will sacrifice yourself for mankind. There is no lack of opportunity in our days. Be patient! It will come. Wait! Be ready! . . ."

He had risen, and I rose. He wished to speak, but he could not. But his hand, in my hand, spoke for him. He gave me a look, like a shy young girl giving thanks. And he went away.

I saw him again but once, at a distance, without his knowledge: I will relate it. But I heard afterwards that he was grateful to me for not sparing him, for having treated him as a man sacrificed beforehand, and entitled to feel a proud joy in his doom.

XV

For the moment, care had the upper hand; the gold of his honey was dark. A tragic vision cast a shadow. It is difficult at twenty-five to renounce victory (in the sense of the world, which one despises in vain: all the more that one's feet burn to crush it! . . .). But Marc's heart beat faster. One was not Annette's son without conceiving of another victory—that of Socrates and the Man on the Cross, that of John Huss and of Giordano Bruno, that of those who make the joy of others with their blood—*"Durch Leiden Freude"*—from the lance-thrust the fountain, at which the panting harts drink. . . . *"Sicut cervi. . . ."* He was proud and sad (poor boy!) that my eyes had selected him. Was it then written on his forehead? However that might be, he was grateful to those who spoke to him according to the law, the sole law of truth! For he understood now, better than ever, that that law was his: it was his mission to be true! To suffer, to err, to contradict himself, even to fall and soil himself, but to be true! One will get up again. One washes. A true soul cannot be damned. The worm of death cannot gnaw the incorruptible truth. And Marc's heart swelled at the thought that this very law of truth with which his nature was stamped, was also, though he had not known it, the core of the soul of that Gandhi towards whom a blind instinct of defense had urged him—though he was not to follow the same path. I had revealed to him the *Credo* of the frail unbreakable little man who led three hundred million men: *"Truth is God."*

Therefore, he was to deny nothing of the profound forces of his nature, even if there was enmity between

them, even if in their gnawing of each other they gnawed his vitals. The independence of the individual, and sacrifice for the community. Marx and Gandhi. The *Still Voice* of the eternal soul, daughter of God, and the grandiose *Anankè* of historic materialism, with the anvil and the hammer, that forges and reforges society. Will it ever forge the two metals together into a beautiful and durable alloy? Or will it be crushed between the anvil and the hammer? Who dies, will see. . . . Meanwhile, forge! With your flesh, with your pain! And burn yourself, if need be, but never let the fire die out!

Annette was struck by the fire that burned, those evenings, in her boy's eyes. But he did not tell her of the visit. That exaltation lasted for a few days, and then died down in the wear and tear of every day's jolts. But some embers remained in the depths of the soul which were never quenched again.

Resolved to fight his battle, alone and for all, without compromise, Marc found himself gradually cold-shouldered by all parties, for they deemed him unassimilable. They did not brutally reject him; it was not their way, the equivocal way of the times; they simply dropped him. The articles he sent to their papers were not refused, but put aside. He bled himself to publish a little pamphlet, in which he denounced the collusion, of which he had been made aware, between the nationalist industrials of France and Germany, under the complaisant wing of their governments. But the pamphlet was mechanically kept out of all the kiosks and bookshops. Better still, it disappeared as soon as it left the printer's. Nearly all the stock was engulfed, as if the public had absorbed it. Six months later the remainders reappeared, vomited up, yellow, rancid, dirty, unsold: not a copy had been read. At the back of what shop, in what cubby hole of the Offices that watch

over the public safety, had Marc's thoughts stagnated? The one thing certain was that Marc found himself with his dish clouts on his hands, and a nice bill to pay for storage. He set his teeth, tightened his belt, swallowed his rage, and retired under his tent. The hour had not come. The hour would come when his thought would be written in his blood. Then they would be obliged to read it! . . . Meanwhile he had to clarify that troubled overburdened mind; and first he had to feed the stomach by which it lived. The Indian[1] has said: *"No God for empty stomachs!"*

He had luckily found work with an old master craftsman, an individualist and libertarian of the old style, who made art bindings. These old trades are dying out for lack of customers with the old fine taste of the West. The profit was scarcely enough for one person to rub along on. Elisée Rateau could have done without a companion if he had not taken a fancy to the young out-of-work intellectual, whose thin, early Renaissance hands were skillful at the fine craft, and whose honest, hurt, individualist's pride screened him from the Machine in the street, the new world. He never suspected that the new world had come into his house with the young man's tormented mind. But Marc clenched his teeth on his thoughts and kept silent, letting the old man talk on without listening to him. And working side by side they soliloquized, one with his mouth open, the other with his mouth shut. The precise movement of busy fingers did not prevent care from sapping the heart.

Assia, expelled, driven away, denied, returned to the warm house of that body which the ardent essence of her kisses had never left. Memory of her, silent, heavy and

[1] Ramakrishna.

swollen like a fever, burned in all his limbs. He could not have evoked her features; he felt her diffused in his head, in his stomach, in the quivering of his hands, in the dryness of his tongue. And, sometimes, he started at a tone of voice or a touch that left him gasping, helpless and upset, like a defective compass. He had to strain his energy to tighten up his relaxed reason. But then his reason, to master the object, had to tear it out of itself, take it by the shoulders, stare it out of countenance, and say: "Stay there! You can't come in! . . ." Then one had time to look the other up and down! But Marc's glance fell, pierced through by an electric shock, and did not dare to rise beyond the chin: for he felt himself scrutinized by those eyes, and he did not want to appear to avoid them; and out of bravado, his eyes devoured the hostile body, and he trembled that he was powerless to bend it under him. Yet it was no longer the wounded pride of the first days, jealousy seeking revenge. The worst of the crisis was exhausted. With his forehead, mouth, and eyes glued to that headless torso (he would not look at the head), he began to imbue himself again with the wild odor of that body, to dissolve himself in it as in those nights when they were made one, to lose himself in order to find in the depths of that well the self of the other and her thoughts. And now the flesh of his fingers touched the reasons—the true reasons—of Assia's treason. *"True"* and *"treason"*: these two words clashed like an angry contradiction: but he could not separate them; he was caught and clawed by their nails. He breathed in, with the odor of Assia's thighs, the deadly void of that individualism, without windows or doors onto the great life of men and action, in which he had tried to immure her with himself. More honest than he, and madder, crueler and more brutal, swayed by instinct, Assia had beaten down the walls. She

had walked over his body. The vital instinct had not deceived her. She was closer to nature. She had been true. She had fled, fled from death—as those in a burning building, seized by panic, make a savage rush for the exit, careless of their companions.

"She did right! . . ."

Marc confessed it, against his will, and he heard his own lips, where his tongue licked the taste of Assia's saliva, open against his will to say:

"Save yourself, darling! And God be thanked that you did save yourself! . . . As to me, I who did not know how to save you, let me save myself, if I can! If I cannot, let me die! Do not turn back to look at me! It is for me alone to save myself. And you have shown me the way . . ."

XVI

But this forced confession was covered, an instant later, by storms of ulcerated pride, which reared itself neighing: "Betrayed! You have betrayed me!" and refused to forgive. And in that typhoon of opposing passions, and in that void, that collapse of the ideas which his mind had assembled and built together, and cemented so that they gave him some sort of shelter, he was naked, raw and flaming like a torch of desire. His starved young body, which he forced to famine, rebelled against him. Asceticism is a dangerous discipline after a thousand and one nights of ardent and stormy embraces. Desire is like cocaine; only with pain and prudence can the poison be got rid of. To break off is to risk breaking oneself: the body grows delirious, and the will loses control of it. Marc was charged with electricity, like a day of dry burning mist, feverish and without moisture, beneath one of those white summer skies that weigh over Paris. The cracked burning earth calls out for rain and, when the downpour comes, it gapes and steams. The downpour was waiting for Marc, suspended. . . .

The secret had been guarded in vain: the rupture between the young couple was known. One of the first to find it out, even before the news got abroad, was Bernadette Verdier, née Passereau (for she had exchanged one bird's name for another), Marc's fiancée that might have been.[1]

When Marc got married, she had closed the shutters on her disappointment. No one had seen anything of it,

[1] See "The Death of a World."

not even Sylvie, who knew of it and expected her to grieve. She showed an admirable indifference, and Sylvie was almost angry at it. She wanted the other to suffer and complain, so that she might have a companion in her resentment. But Bernadette left her to fume alone; and Sylvie's position was ridiculous. She could scarcely play the part of disdained fiancée on her own account! She bore Bernadette almost as great a grudge as she did Assia. She called her:

"Stupid fool!"

But Bernadette was not disturbed. Not for an instant did she desist from her cold smile. She was not playing to the gallery. She could not have said exactly why she was like this, nor if it was an attitude of defense. She did not try to discover what was going on within her. Yes, there were moments when she felt an atrocious pain at her heart, and the rest of the time a deadly boredom under which lay hidden, in the rock at the bottom of the hole, little hard triangular heads—a knot of thoughts, their long shapes coiled, their eyes ferocious: it was better not to move the stones! . . . One lives, one lives. It was a case of living on the only plane a Bernadette thinks admissible: reasonable and practical life. There is no sense in brooding for ever over regrets. And as to rancors, one cannot build on rancors; but one builds; and one folds the rancors away in camphor, in the clothes-chest: they can wait. Bernadette had gone calmly on her way; and since she must have a husband, she had taken one. Taken him according to the standard of her practical reason, which included the three satisfactions: of ambition, of bourgeois comfort, and of the bed.

André Verdier, whom she chose, was an industrialist of thirty-five, partner in a well-known old firm (they are soon old in Paris) of motor car manufacturers. He had

known how to make his pile in ten years, waiting the time to start a firm of his own, whose first care would be to knock the bottom out of the old house that had trained and maintained him. He was a handsome man, with pale blue eyes and regular features, smiling, amiable, and affable—prodigiously indifferent. He was a great favorite with women. How did Bernadette come to please him? He had only to throw the handkerchief for the loveliest and richest to pick it up. It was Bernadette's revenge for her wounded pride of body. She must conquer this man, since another man had disdained her. She was anything rather than beautiful—thin and swarthy—but she was tall and supple, she knew how to make the most of her shortcomings, according to the taste of the day:

> ". . . the elegant thinness
> Of the shoulder with its sharp contour,
> The slightly pointed hip, and the waist swaying
> Like an angry reptile . . ."

Verdier, who was a connoisseur in women, read on this woman's mouth, thin-lipped and tense under the lip-stick, the promise of nights without boredom; and, in the cold and precise steel-gray eyes, the pledge of days as active as the nights, but laboring in a different field. It did not take the two of them very long to come to an understanding upon a fruitful and well-regulated improvement of life. And the substantial *dot* that Sylvie had assured to her ward was the final compensation for her plainness. The thing was settled before Sylvie got wind of it. She gave her consent sulkily. Her own marriage in bygone days had been nothing to boast about; it was not very brilliant. But at least her Leopold was of the stout stuff that lasts and gives security. She saw through the fundamental defects of Bernadette's chooser (or her chosen). Bernadette saw them as well as she did: under the shirt-front of the insolent parvenu with his silky eyes, moral (often physical) cowardice, and unctuous lying, which is a form and an effect of cowardice—the arrant weakness of character which evades and flies from truth, and whose sole art is to disguise it to itself; a man who has never dared to look at his naked soul in the glass, but who knows very well how to see that of others, their vices, weaknesses, and blemishes, so as to exploit them—never their sorrows, for those do not interest him, and if they did they might hamper him; he does not like to do evil for evil's sake, but for his own good. And yet, on occasion, when he feels himself protected by impunity—whether in tête-à-tête with another (of course, if the other is the weaker!) or, in a great crisis, war or panic, when he depends on the elementary brutality of collective opinion—he may very well become ferocious. After all, it is a type of "honest man" sufficiently common nowadays: middle-class bourgeois. We have forgotten to grow indignant, provided that he keeps his accounts correctly and exercises his legal honesty at the expense of others than ourselves and our incomes. Bernadette felt no anxiety. In tête-à-tête, she would not be the weaker of the two. And in public she knew as well as he did how to keep in step with public opinion: it is the strongest, and when one leans upon the strongest one is the strongest. Verdier's very defects were her guarantee: she would hold him more securely than a Marc, whom she would have been foolish enough to respect—not out of esteem, but out of love.

And the marriage turned out well. Verdier, duly bridled, walked circumspectly. She did the same. Never a hole in the contract. Both were too busy bringing business profits to a round figure. And Bernadette's thin figure also found time to grow round, twice. While one is

planting fortune, one must also plant the heir. The heir came. First, the son, then the daughter: one must think of the future; the day will come to get oneself a son-in-law. And Bernadette was a good mother, as she was a good wife, without any great love—which does not mean without attachment. One values what one has, especially what one has taken and fashioned—because it is "my" property, I take care of it.

But in the opaque darkness of her subconscious mind, which she discovered again in her bed, when she undressed the soul under her skin during her long hours of insomnia, her old desire came out of its hole, silent, wounded, on the watch. Without anyone being aware of it, out of the corner of her eye, with a glance sharpened by rancor, she spied upon Marc's home. She saw the cracks before anyone else. And when the rupture took place, she knew it (by what eavesdropping means?) from the very first days—before Annette.

She made only one mistake (and whether the mistake was not deliberate will never be known); she mentioned it to her sister Colombe. She told her, without emotion, as a fact, the disarray into which Marc had been thrown by his wife's betrayal, and the moral solitude in which he was living. The tender-hearted Colombe was moved by it. The coldness, not without a spice of irony, with which Bernadette spoke of it, contributed rather than detracted from it; for it made Colombe feel sorry for Marc. She had a childhood's attraction to him. As a little girl she had known him through Bernadette's conversations with Sylvie, who sang the praises of her colt even when chaffing, for she wanted to put him in the elder sister's field. And Colombe looked at him over the fence of the field with wide eyes in which were written admiration mixed with innocent envy; she bowed down, sighing, before the

happy destiny of her elder; and when that destiny was shattered, she sighed over it more than the elder. She had a tender soul, romantic and wounded—eternally: for at the least contact her beautiful skin was scratched by the claw of life. But that beautiful skin had never tempted Marc, though he was greedy; the bad luck had been that Marc, vexed at the marriage bait which Sylvie held out to him, visited his irritation upon the whole family; and the interested pursuit of the steel-gray eyes annoyed him neither more nor less than Colombe's great brown ecstatic eyes which innocently drank him in. Yet those eyes were beautiful, more beautiful than Assia's; and beautiful were those arms, that neck, those cheeks and that mouth, pure, sad, rather silly, and tempting. . . . But love bloweth where it listeth. It had not filled Colombe's sails. All her life it was to blow askew for her. But then why did she not know how to maneuver? She waited, she hoped, she let things slide. Poor Colombe! It was never her pigeon that found the way to the dovecot.

Sylvie had disposed of her destiny, as she had (but unsuccessfully) of Bernadette's. Her prettiness, the native grace of her movements, to which a naïve bashfulness of heart gave an extra charm, designated her, in the eyes of the expert queen dowager of Parisian games and pleasures, for "*saltare et piacere.*" She was made to enter the school of ballet dancing. The little flower conscientiously stretched the fine flexible stalks of her legs. She worked as well as she could, not without success, but without pleasure. She would rather have twined them round the beloved. (Which? No matter which, but he who was to be the beloved of her whole life!) But to offer them to a crowd of anonymous lovers hurt her and made her ashamed. She had nothing, absolutely nothing to fit her for the theater, not even that very innocent spot of natural

mummery that sleeps or dances in nearly every pretty girl in Paris. She would have liked to spend her life by her own fireside, or in her bed, her bed for two who make one. Sylvie might pride herself on having quite a flair when she meddled with psychology! But she was determined not to be wrong. If nature rebelled, so much the worse for nature! The gentle Colombe did not rebel; she sighed, but she resigned herself. And after the school she docilely allowed herself to be engaged in the corps de ballet of a large theater, half music hall, half opera, which was being started. Her docility did not prevent her from remaining a star of second magnitude; but with her charms it would have been child's play for a shrewder girl to become, as Forain says, a comet of Grand Opera. Only a protector was lacking. Protectors were not lacking. The poor girl never knew how to accept them opportunely, nor how to refuse them when inopportune. She wanted to follow the dictates of her heart. Her heart wept, and said "no" to all "serious" protectors—then pursued, and worn out, said "yes," by way of escaping, to protectors who were not serious. Afterwards she would come sobbing to Sylvie (she dared not come any more now), and Sylvie would say:

"Great goose! Who ever landed me with such a ninny?"

Or to Bernadette, who put on a bored look:

"I have no time . . ."

and who thought:

"Do it or don't do it! But don't tell! . . . Do I go telling?"

She had no one to pour herself out to but her brother Ange, the seminarist. The good boy heard some confessions! But that was, or would be his calling: one must get used to it! He was doing so. Besides, he had been

used to receiving her confidences from childhood. And in her candor and trust there were some of every hue. However shocked by the confidences of to-day, he listened calmly, with patience and pity, for he knew his Colombe too well not to recognize the same candor in all her errors and shame; and if it had lain with him to give absolution, he would have poured it freely on her soiled plumage; lacking the lustral water, he poured out his tenderness and the balm of his homilies, with which the little dancer mingled her cooing interspersed with sobs.

But the confessor was not always available; he was meditating in retreat. Then, after being ordained, he was given a parish in the provinces. And Colombe, who was no hand at writing, had to keep her misfortune to herself. It is not certain that the pious Ange did not find it a great relief. He continued to send her consolation by post, at long intervals. But no more than she did he possess the simple art of speaking in writing. In speaking and writing he was two different men. He who spoke to Colombe through the post was flowery and unctuous, a holy priest full of the word of God. Colombe read religiously, and then made the sign of the cross. But she felt cold. She waited; she needed the man's words to warm her. His arms, also, and his embrace. . . .

Marc's conjugal catastrophe, which Bernadette had confided to her, upset her as if it had been her own. She spent more than one night turning it over on her hot pillow. She turned Marc over on it too, quite innocently. The romantic girl made herself a Marc in her own image, loving, unloved, betrayed, abandoned. She longed to warm him and thereby warm herself. . . . Oh! humbly! To console him while consoling herself. Afterwards, who knows? But on those nights she read no further. . . . Her thoughts refused to turn the page.

And one morning, she found herself, God knows how! in Marc's path. Ravishing to behold, discreetly made up, her delicate face brightened by a moderate and exquisite pencil, artistically presented, she looked good enough to eat. And the young wolf was hungry. Neither of them meant any harm. Nature had taken the matter in hand. In truth, Colombe had no idea (so she thought) but to console him. And that, in the ordinary way, was what the proud Marc would least have tolerated. But by an uncalculated trick of instinct, she, usually so clumsy, ingenuously presented herself to Marc as one looking for consolation from a brother in arms, wounded like herself, but stronger. Few words, sweet sad eyes, which did not stress, but settled like a hand laid lightly on an arm, careful not to lean hard: one could only feel the warm fingers through the stuff . . . How beautiful they were, those fingers, those eyes, Marc discovered for the first time! (He was fasting.) They even seemed (it's incredible) intelligent to him. And the best of it was that at that moment they really were intelligent. Loving flesh, the blind beauty, works these miracles. Unfortunately, they do not last. But if they last long enough to achieve the end, that is all she wants.

Marc, without thinking of it, found himself with his hand on the pretty girl's arm as they walked along the street together, affectionately confiding in each other. She had asked no questions; without being questioned he told her, with sober truth, but without passion, as if speaking of another person, about his misfortune; and she said neither "Oh!" nor "Ah!" She asked nothing more than what he chose to pour into her ear and her heart. He had no need to stress matters. She knew. She understood. At least, her eyes made him believe it. Marc was not to be outdone; out of gratitude he displayed the same intelligent sympathy for the other's troubles. They caught his attention for the first time: for he had never bothered about them before. He was pleased to detach himself a moment from his own, to bend fraternally over those of the little dancer. To his first questions on the subject, she replied with such a look of distracted gratitude that Marc was nearly floored by it. They sat down in the shadow of a statue in a square, surrounded by the noise of traffic. She opened her Pandora's box for him. But the same ingenuous art which had hitherto guided her, held back misplaced confidences at the edge of the box, and let nothing filter through her fingers but sweet and touching confessions of a chaste and wounded passion. Though Marc was anything rather than a simpleton, and might have known what to think of the timidity of the Colombe of the corps de ballet, at that moment he was ready, had she asked him, to give her communion without confession. It was the devil she would have asked for! . . . The devil was tempted too. But Marc persisted in defending the integrity of his widowhood. Vainly did he look upon the faithless one as dead. Precisely! He made it a point of honor. Pride was the accomplice of love, denied and again denied, for the woman who had played him false: also the hate and furious contempt which he felt bound to profess for all women and which he would not renounce. Therefore he meant to keep in the neutral zone of brotherly friendship the interest he admitted feeling in the lovely plaintive eyes of the little dancer, and the luscious fruit of her mouth. But neutral zones are dangerous ground in the warfare of to-day. Some fine morning, one wakes up invaded . . .

The invader was discreet. She, the little silly, had learned from her heart to retreat in the flush of victory, so as to make herself desired. She took care not to tire

the patience, too new to last, of the complaisant listener; she did not wait for him to take his leave, she left first. She made their meetings rare, and refused to grant him what he expected her to offer: that he should come to her home. She was afraid that his too sophisticated eyes would recognize the source of her kept luxury; and at the same time the sincere exaltation of her love would have suffered, if she had received in that bed him from whom she hoped to receive the gift of her lost virginity that she might give it back to him, smelted anew. And so the affair dragged on for a long time, without their seeing each other except for a few moments in the streets; and yet the young wolf's hunger increased. But the sheep who languished to be eaten recovered all her silliness, to run after every meeting to her good sister Bernadette, who showed a warm interest in hearing the progress of the adventure and gave her sure advice. Colombe never failed to tell her everything, so intoxicated with her recital that she never saw the hardening of the other's eyes. And the day came when, panting from coming up too fast (she could not wait for the lift), she cried out her happiness in advance (Bernadette's dry hand put a stopper on her mouth); she was to go to Marc that night; the proud boy had begged and prayed and she had let the *Amen* be dragged from her. She had held herself down not to cry out: "At last! At last! . . . I kiss your hands. . . . Thank you! Thank you! . . ."

Bernadette urged very seriously that she should not endanger her success by showing her weakness too plainly; she interested herself in the costume which the lover was to wear that night; she calmly discussed its details; and above all she advised Colombe not to arrive before the appointed hour; it was better to keep him waiting. Colombe left, her heart swelling with gratitude. Everything was beautiful, everything was good, heaven and earth, men and God. And most beautiful and best the beloved who awaited her that night . . . She laughed to herself in the street; and with closed eyes she already swooned, like Danaë, in his embrace.

Marc had not "begged and prayed," he had let the suction of those beautiful ass's eyes, like those of the *Fornarina*, draw from him the invitation to come to him in his wretched room. By dint of seeing them written in that glance, he had ended by saying the words, which were hardly out of his mouth when she had snapped them up, all hot. They were said. It was too late to take them back. But he was displeased with himself. He had sincerely meant to refuse this adventure, though he had foreseen it from the first day. He would have liked to keep over Assia the advantage of fidelity, even without reason, to have more reasons for despising her. And he was not unaware of the dangers of pledges given to the romantic sensual avidity of the beautiful she-ass of Trastevere. Let him beware to whom she attaches herself! She binds him. He was resolved not to let himself be bound; and even that night, as he waited for her, he duped himself by assuring himself that he would not go beyond a blameless conversation. In defending himself, he felt bound to defend her: for being her elder, and having known her as a child, he felt that he had a certain duty towards her. He even repeated to himself (what impudence!) the lesson he would read her. But he lost the thread as he said it over; he was absent-minded. He counted the quarters on the church clock close by; and he could not sit still . . . He began again, for the tenth time, the phrase of prudish welcome which he was preparing, but never succeeded in finishing. He heard hasty steps, eager steps, on the stairs. The end of the phrase was forgotten. The beginning like-

wise. His hand found its way to the handle, and the door was open before it was knocked at. Before they saw each other they heard, on both sides, gasps like those of runners.

The Marathon runner came in. He had just time to catch a glimpse of the bust leaning forward, with the head enveloped in a mantilla. A quick hand had turned off the electric switch near the door. With the door shut, they were clasped together in the dark, like the two halves of a box, and the eager mouth plunged. He was seized and he seized her. He lost knowledge of what followed. They came to themselves rolling pell-mell in the bed; he was panting under the blows of the hawk's beak. What a dove! She was not satisfied. They rolled once more, in the dark. But as the fever abated, his eyes began to see in the darkness, and he saw above him the beak and round eyes of the bird of prey, and he did not recognize his bird. Freeing himself and feeling her, he felt the hard thighs and thin arms. His breath stopped. He made an effort to sit up, and he called out:

"Colombe!"

But the thin arms held him fast, and against his mouth, the open mouth widening laughed and laughed; and one long arm stretched upwards and turned on the electric switch above their heads. In the hard light that blinded him, he saw over him, her bust raised, but imprisoning him between her legs, the thieving magpie, swarthy, skinny Bernadette, triumphant . . . *"Nigra sum, sed pulchra . . ."* And so she was, in all the glow of her voluptuousness, her cunning and her victory. He stared at her in amazement, and foolishly repeated:

"Colombe . . ."

She laughed shrilly and said:

"Fulfill the week of Leah, and we will give thee the other also for the service which thou shalt serve with us yet seven other years." [1]

Her laugh, her eyes, her sharp teeth, her wide mouth working with excitement, cunning and pleasure, and above all that reek of earth opening to the sun, the happy body glowing for the first time, under the mouth it had coveted, longed for and conquered, turned the head of the vanquished. The protest he was vainly trying to formulate, with a tongue paralyzed like his conscience, died before it was born. He laughed nervously too, and seizing Leah round the thighs he served her for another year.

At that moment, sweating and in a fever, he heard "the other" stopping on the landing and knocking . . . And he was struck as by a thunderbolt! The lightning flash roused and pierced him, he tore away the living ivy, he sat up, his brain in a whirl, prostrated . . . "The other" was waiting outside the door, she was listening, through the crack she could see the light which they had forgotten to switch off. He looked like a little boy caught doing wrong, and trying to deny it; he stretched his arm awkwardly over Bernadette's body, as her sharp eyes scrutinized him, to put out the light, and missed it in his flurry. Meanwhile Colombe, impatient on the threshold, began to tap at the door again. And under his half-raised body he saw the *gazza-ladra,* whose wide mouth was preparing for one of the shrill laughs he knew. He made horrified eyes at her to impose silence. Too late! . . . The shrill laugh rang out sharp as a gimlet, it unwound itself and echoed right round the room, and under the door, and sent its sharp points through the keyhole. Violently Marc applied his palm, brutal as a slap, over her mouth. Too

[1] The French differs slightly from both the Revised and Douai versions.

late! . . . He heard a moan outside the door . . . Then silence! . . . He sat paralyzed, unable even to think, unconscious of Bernadette's teeth biting into his palm. And the other stood still also, on the threshold, leaning against the wall, as if inhibited by grief . . . And suddenly a heartrending cry. They heard her headlong flight down stairs . . . Marc sprang out of bed, shoved the clinging woman away with a fist against her chest, and ran out on the stairs. Leaning over, he called:

"Colombe!"

He even ran down after her to the next landing. But the sobbing Colombe did not come back, and the street door closed on her inarticulate "Hou, hou, hou . . ." He went upstairs again. Bernadette was standing naked, stretching herself before the glass; curiously she touched with her finger the bruise his fist had made on her breast; and sitting down on the edge of the bed, she calmly dressed herself. Marc stood motionless, stupidly watching her; and it was "the other" he saw. But between "the other" and his eyes, this naked woman, thin and satiated, hung like a curtain; dark of skin, her hair disheveled, she displayed her ugliness, proud of success; every detail of her body, the hairy thighs, the bony feet, the spine like a starved cat's, and the supple hard bust leaning over, the huddled silhouette with the pointed knees drawn up to the Harlequin chin as she put on her shoes and stockings, and the sharp sidelong smile—this whole image was graved deep upon his eyes, as by a knife. He did nothing, not a movement to help her. He was silent. She was silent. She finished dressing herself, she cast a last look at herself in the glass, and saw Marc's stony, gloomy face there, and she smiled; she turned round, put her hands on his shoulders, and plunged her steely gray eyes into his eyes and searched them, and under the ruins of

desire and confusion she found a lance-head: hatred. Then her victory was complete. She had had her revenge and her pleasure. As she withdrew she cast a last appraising look upon the battlefield, the bed, the room, and the face of the vanquished. All was as it should be. Since the laugh between the sheets, they had not broken the silence. When she was on the landing she remembered the mantilla which had fallen in the corner of the room when she came in. She went back. Marc bent down, picked it up, and handed it to her. Thanking him with a jerk of her chin, she saw the troubled state in which she was leaving him, and becoming human after her own fashion, she said:

"Don't worry yourself about it!"

And went away.

XVII

After a night of troubled sleep, Marc awoke, his body eased, his heart full of shame. The moral discomfort was less in harmony with physical well-being than it would have been with illness. He was gnawed by one anxiety. He had no time to attend to it; he had slept late, and he was obliged to rush off to his work; he read no newspaper. But the underlying anxiety floated below the surface all day.

Late in the evening, on the way home, he heard two girls in the train talking about a dancer who had thrown herself into the river. He bought a paper at the first kiosk, and standing in the rain, on the gleaming pavement, under a street lamp, he read the bits of news which would supply the petit bourgeois of Paris with gossip for a few hours. What he was reading he had read and seen, during his troubled sleep that night. The distracted Colombe had fled to the Seine, and thrown herself in under the Pont Saint Michel. She had been fished out, half dead, and taken to the hospital; her identity had not been established till the next day. Her condition was still too serious to admit of her being taken home. Her name shone brightly for a little while in the newspapers: her plunge accomplished what her pirouettes had not, and gave her an aureole of Bengal light. And tongues wagged busily upon the cause of her despair. Marc's tongue grew dry in his mouth. He was petrified with horror. He did not feel the rain drenching him. He wandered about the streets and quays and found himself at the Pont Saint Michel; he inspected the dark reflections under the arches and the lighted windows of the hospital. He went home

feverish; and the following days dragged about with influenza to his work and to the hotel in the vicinity of the Etoile, where he went to inquire after Colombe. But they told him that she had not come home: and at the hospital, that she had left. He did not know where to apply for news; for nothing on earth would have induced him to see Bernadette again. She made no attempt to see him, or, for that matter, to avoid him. She had got what she wanted: her success, and the appeasement of the secret desire which had tormented her for years. That appeasement forbade any remorse and satisfied her hunger for a long time. Nothing remained but to fold the downy wings of oblivion over the secret of her pleasure. She had returned to the routine of her domestic life, which half a night of cold calculated delirium had scarcely interrupted. She was furious at Colombe's reverberating plunge; it forced her to reconsider the trick by which she had cheated and won the game; and above all, it caused the intrusion of opinion, sniffing after the truffle of "what will they say!" into the respectable Verdier-Passereau family. She did not even send for news of the rescued; for her "honor" was wounded by the scandal.

But returning from the workshop one night, Marc found a curé walking up and down before his door, stared at by all the passing women of the district. It was Ange. They had a long and queer interview in Marc's room. The good priest told him that Colombe, convalescent from pneumonia, had retired to a provincial home of a semi-religious character; she refused ever to go back to her hotel or to the theater. Ange had spent hours by her bedside, and had received her confidences from her own lips or from her nurse who had heard them, hot and unveiled, spoken in fever; he knew more than he said—and probably more than there was to know. Marc saw plainly that

Colombe had made no mystery of her passion for him, but Ange imagined that he had responded to it, and that they had been lovers. Perhaps, by dint of desiring it, she thought so herself. In any case she had let Ange believe it. The worthy curé, shaking his head, looked at Marc with an air of affectionate reproach; he looked as if he wished to say something he did not say, or else were waiting for something that Marc did not say either. . . . What did he want? . . . He hesitated, and he coughed; then he spoke of another subject, Marc's own conjugal drama, for he was well informed; but the word "conjugal" was not pronounced; he was careful not to say "your wife"; without sacrament, the union to him was not valid; and the rupture, on the whole, brought Marc back to a regular way of life. He groped, he floundered . . . And suddenly, Marc understood; the holy man, now that Marc was free, wanted him virtuously to marry his sister Colombe. Thus, all sins, after repentance, would be forgiven *ad majorem gloriam Dei*, and in conformity with the interests of the family. Ange, the curé, was sincere in his piety; and sincere also were the good brother, who desired the welfare of his little sister, and the knowing peasant of Paris, who did not forget human laws and their bonds. It only remained for Marc to get angry, or pretend to be dense. He did the latter. He became afflicted with a deplorable deafness. The curé Ange coughed and raised his voice in vain; left alone on a compromising ground, he took a few steps, and stuck fast, he stopped, looked at Marc, understood, sighed, and bearing no malice, gave him his blessing, and took himself off.

Marc pitied Colombe; but he felt no remorse about her. His remorse concerned another. Was it remorse, or vexation? Although there was little chance that the other would ever hear of it, he was mortified at having

fallen into the trap, the more so since it was the same trap in which Assia had been caught and where, in his pride and passion, he had scorned her. And, moreover, that it had been to find a raven at the bottom of the pit, instead of a dove, made him ashamed, doubly ashamed, like a fox caught by a skinny hen. His discomfiture, which made him sore against Bernadette, in the rebound made him examine himself seriously. He had to acknowledge that he had no right to condemn the weakness of others beyond remission, and that, man or woman, there was nothing to reproach each other with, one was not worth much! The opportunity made the sinner, more than the will. The pitiful will! Marc, so proud of his own, felt that it had not much weight when the great craving arose in the body. Not only that of love. All follies, all passions, in which the excess blood of the being rises to the neck of conscience and submerges it. . . . There was but one remedy: to make use of those torrents as of a great fire that feeds the blast furnaces; that desire, that passion should be the spur that urges on the forces of Action! "*Primum agere* . . ." Action is wholesome and necessary. But where was action? . . . Assia was right to go in quest of it, far from him.

Had she found it?

XVIII

Assia was rushing about Europe with her nose to the scent, but she had not caught the game.

Millions of men, men and women—especially those under thirty—were rushing about like herself. As soon as she had crossed the frontier she had come upon these feverish nations of youth, rushing and tearing, stumbling, butting into each other like rams, towards some action, no matter what, which eluded them—towards a vertiginous becoming. And in that post-war Germany there was a chaos of soul, drifting to furious despair. Everything they had believed in was destroyed. State, family, society, all the traditions of thought, every form of certitude, and even the idea of certitude. All belief in a stable and absolute point was spat out as an ignoble lie and cowardice. And these young herds of Dante's damned, which the mad selfishness of the French victors had let loose like tornadoes between the walls of their dreary prison, bereft of hope, had one fury in common: hatred against the walls that suffocated them, against calmness, against order, against the stupid security of that prison of the past, symbolized in the eyes of the world by the France of those days, enriched, glutted, belching her victory, her obese arteriosclerosis bent on opposing itself to the chaos, disorder, and conflict which are the necessary circulation of the world's blood. All the sufferings of defeat and rancors of ruin were skillfully captured and disciplined by the astute powers, rivals or enemies of France, by the cynical German capitalists, exploiters of German misery, and by the fishers in the troubled waters of social convulsions; then mobilized against France the

only scapegoat, the only living corpse, made solely responsible for the dreadful agony of a rebellious world which she was attempting to bind to her decaying body. And what brought water to the mill was the imbecile self-sufficiency of the Poincarés, Painlevés, Herriots, and Tardieus (all equal in their obtuse self-satisfaction and certainty!), their murderous certainty that they had safe in their pockets dead truth, and ossified progress: Immortal Principles won by their great-grandfathers and now laid in the earth (that cemetery!). . . . *"Miller, you are asleep!"* The mill is grinding despair and hatred. New wars for the Right are being prepared, fed by a new ideology: Right to Life, Right to Movement, to Mutations, to Explosions of the compressed human mass in fermentation, Right to Chaos. . . .

The Right to Chaos was a right to which Germany then gave herself good measure. At all times Chaos had been her element; the German mind delights in it, upon the pretext that chaos renews. . . . *"Stirb und werde!* . . ." But in practice everything ended in military organizations. She needed hard basins and trustworthy pipes in which to pour the boiling metal and make it serve the ends of the Krupps, Thyssens, and Hugenbergs of industry and affairs, who lead the world of to-day.

Assia heard echoes of it in her work as a shorthand-typist, which made her a living machine to register the secret meetings of the Franco-German delegates of the great firms of heavy industry. Her unequaled technical skill, and the intelligent impersonality which effaced itself as if she wore the invisible ring on her finger, had brought her confidential posts in the suite of the French masters of secret politics and finance. It lay with herself to take advantage of it. She took advantage of it only for the sake of experience and the thirst for vengeance which she

was secretly acquiring against society. She also acquired a good deal of contempt for the poor and exploited, worthy folk who let themselves be led as if by a ring through the nose. One did what one liked with them in Germany. Thanks to their congenital incoherence—that cerebral fever which is at home in the skull of two-thirds of the Germans, those who think, or believe they think—their ideological revolt was enlisted under the banner of the slaveries and Fascisms, present or to come, of finance and violence, the murderers of liberty. Assia could not understand why all these currents and furious winds banged themselves against the walls, and caromed off in zigzags, or went round and round in spirals, instead of rushing into the only channel which led to a free and wide future, the narrow door which opened to the East upon the U.S.S.R. But save for a few nuclei of Communism, the obscure tenacious pride of the German privileged race, the ideological cretinism of the one hundred per cent "Aryan" man, made even those who wanted Revolution at the price of their blood, want it, though they did not admit it to themselves, made in Germany. And the slavers took advantage of it.

But that issue—that door of the East which held Assia's eyes, why did she not slip through it herself? She hung about it, she approached, the draught from the door drew her, she felt herself sucked by it; but at the last moment she flung herself aside, and dragged herself away from the suction. . . . Why? Her true work should have been over there; she was daily more convinced of it, and others gave her to understand as much. She did not pass unperceived at Berlin, nor at Oslo; she was kept under surveillance. Djanelidze had pointed her out, and they knew that she was their voluntary ally, posted in the enemy's camp. She soon realized that she was not the

only one in the same position. Just as on the eve of the Great Invasions, the barbarians enlisted in the Roman army, the Revolution is creeping into the great capitalist Headquarters, into the workshops and offices, into the ears listening at doors and the quick hands that tap out Staff secrets. Assia's eyes were caught by one or another of her comrades, her unknown, unexpected accomplices, typists or secretaries, in the middle of the councils of war of the great captains of industry. They smelled each other out, silently; the odor of the clan! There was no need for paid enrollment. The best enrollment is that of free instinct, that of the blood. When a civilization is tottering on the eve of the eruption, the earth opens beneath its crust, and the breath of fire spreads through the veins. It can infect a bourgeois son of a Western bourgeois quite as easily as the unclassed and uprooted. The shaking of the whole European economy by the war, ruin, inflation, financial crises, unemployment and famine, delivered the body of Europe to the invasion of all the microbes of Revolution. And what else is it but one of those great epidemics which do justice upon ruined social organisms, and periodically make way for new waves of humanity? In this fissured center of Europe the phenomenon manifested itself more implacably, as one drew nearer to the volcano.

But Assia, who was a stream of molten lava from it, did not try to reënter it; despite herself, her course carried her back towards the West. Was it really the West? Or one place, one spot, one magnet in the West? She defended herself against it. You defend yourself only from what threatens you, from what holds you. She chafed against it in vain. She had not recovered full possession of her soul and body. Another's blood was mingled with hers. She could not free herself from it.

She was obliged to face irritating facts. Indirectly solicited to communicate to her comrades in arms the report of the secret deliberations of which her work made her a witness, she should have felt no scruple in delivering it to them; for she did not encumber herself with moral considerations for the enemy. And yet she found it impossible to give it to them; a hand, a curb, was about her throat; she tried to get past it, she reared; the curb, the hand, dragged her back. She gnawed at them. She knew too well whose proud scruples bridled her, the bit which was making her mouth bleed. She chewed over the taste of iron on her tongue. . . . Ah! if she could have chewed the tongue too! As it was not in her mouth she chewed her own—it might have been the other's—with anger and voluptuousness.

She was not the woman to deceive herself for long. She could see what she did not wish to see. So he still held her, that hated and rejected Marc? What was there about him that she could not get away from? She had had twenty opportunities of finding another companion. There was nothing to prevent her. . . . She had not done so. At the last moment the other (no, no, not the other! the one and only) intervened. Why the only one? He had not been so, before. Why should he remain so, after? She rebelled, she insulted him, she stripped him naked to depreciate him, like a buyer feeling the ribs of a skinny hare in the market. He was ugly and scraggy, weak and violent, tender and brutal, a mad flame, intermittent, poor at love but passionate, a sorry piece of game. . . .

"There's your hare, take him who likes! I throw him in your face . . ."

But scarcely thrown . . .

"He's mine! I'll keep him! . . ."

But she did not intend that he should keep her, and

that he should haunt her. She accepted and appointed a rendezvous, so as to break the spell. . . . "Wait for me under the elm!" She did not go. . . . The only one who nearly triumphed was Jean Casimir, whom she met, and who paid shameless court to her: he seemed to her Marc's false *alter ego;* perhaps the thief likewise had a grudge against Marc and wanted for that reason to rob his nest. But as soon (it did not take long!) as she grasped this, she darted a look of rage at him; she hated herself and scorned him like the mud on her shoes.

"Marc! my Marc! What good is it that to escape you I should seek you by such shameful device! But what is it about you that holds me so? . . . Ah! there is this about you, whatever you are, you are my own!"

She was at one of the secret conferences of her employer, the delegate of a great industrial trust; she was busy taking down the discussion in shorthand, when she began to soliloquize in this way. Marc, her Marc, had swooped down upon her; he covered her with his long wings, with his thin limbs:

". . . My skinny one! My ugly bird! My lean hare! All carcass, with thighs like sticks, and knees like stakes, and hard hands that are soft and feverish and leave bruises. . . . And your furies, and weaknesses, now child, now tyrant, and your caresses and your insults, and your torments that harass and scourge one, and then beg a tender word for consolation, that seek my breast and bite or suck it! . . . Little brute! Beloved! . . . I have avenged myself. . . . Not enough! . . . Bite me again! Harder! . . . Ah! how I would like to make you scream! . . ."

She wrote it, unconsciously. She found it, in shorthand, in the middle of accounts of steel and coal. She had very nearly drawn him—in gross (in leanness) and

in detail. She gaped, when she woke, and looked at her cabbalistic pages; and closing her lips she was inwardly convulsed with laughter.

"Marc, my Marc! . . . Ah! it's no use going on deceiving myself! I deceive everybody but myself. . . ."

Now, she had to confess to herself that she loved everything in him, even and above all what had wounded her most. . . . His proud uncompromising attitude, his independence even without action, even without an object, even his hardness now seemed to her beautiful, wholesome, worth taking, even worth knocking against till one bled—when she compared them with these slimy souls, made of mud and spittle.

"I want him! And I will have him— But if *he* won't now? . . . All the more reason! I should like to see him try! . . . I will do without his leave. . . . Yet if it should be too late? If he should have reorganized his life? . . . Well then, he will undo it again! . . ."

She was uneasy all the same. She knew nothing about him. Annette's letters, which she begged for, told of herself and the child, but never mentioned the only one whose name and news she waited for; and she could not ask after him. Jean Casimir, perfidiously (he did not attach much importance to it), told her of an echo from Paris concerning Colombe's being fished out of the Seine, which gave the initiated to understand that she had not fallen from Scylla into Charybdis, but from one River into another. Assia understood the allusion and dug her nails into her palms:

"Dirty play-actress! . . ."

If she had been near the Pont Saint Michel she would have been more likely to hold her mouth under the water.

"Ah! you want to act? Then play out your part! . . ."

She returned to Paris. She had been hesitating for some days. Every day she packed her things and unpacked them every night. This last incident brought her to a decision. She took the train. Even if she did not see him, she must be nearer to him. There was no question of laying down her arms! In the train, on the way back, she doggedly went over the whole case with redoubled hostility. She admitted that she had wounded Marc cruelly; she had agreed to marry him knowing exactly what he was like, what he expected her to give him, and observe towards him; she had been resolved, whatever her own opinion might be, to confine herself loyally in their union within the moral and social limitations of her companion. She would have admitted that in the first impulse of his grief and anger he might have struck, or even killed her. "These are the risks of the trade," as that king said when he was stabbed. One should not fly from the consequences of one's actions. But she could not endure that he should have insulted and despised her; pride and her sense of justice were equally wounded by it. She did not see (perhaps, she did see) that Marc's passion for her still equaled his contempt in violence, and that his contempt was due to despairing passion. She could bear everything from him but contempt. Again, at that moment, in the roaring train, her blood roared louder. She repeated:

"I will never forgive him!"

She saw Annette once more. She saw Vania. They talked of everything but Marc; the touchy one must be the first to mention him. And Assia would sooner have broken her teeth than let that name pass through them. But she often came to see Annette, and she found clumsy pretexts for coming; she waited, they both waited, watching each other's lips. Until Vania, who had not the same

reasons to keep silence, and perhaps had some prompting from his grandmother, asked calmly, with his nose in the air: "And when are you coming back to sleep with daddy?"

Assia turned pale, blushed, sprang up in a fury, bristling all over. And she went away. But on the stairs she laughed:

"The rogue! The little monkey!"

Then she thought that Annette had put him up to it, and in revenge she laid it on herself not to go and see her for a whole month. She held out for a week; and then went every day. But she was determined not to give in.

Marc was just as obstinate. He was quite ready to confide more intimately in his mother. When they were alone together he returned with melancholy to the past, and he did not shrink from acknowledging his disappointment, not with others, but with himself, his mistakes and the irreparable harm one causes. Between the mother and son there were long conversations—interspersed with long silences—tender, bitter, ironical and detached, upon the folly of a love that would monopolize another being, its tyrannical demands, its childish furies, its murderous jealousy. How ridiculous and how pitiful! . . . Annette scanned her boy's face, grown thinner and prematurely older; she saw the little fresh wrinkles round his eyes, the line of the mouth, less irascible, more weary. It sent a pang to her heart. But she knew that only the lance of Achilles can cure what it has wounded. To seize it the two enemies had but to stretch out a hand. But the two fools refused to do it. Annette was sure that they loved each other, that they wanted each other; but neither of them was willing to show his want first. They willed only their own ruin.

Yet they were at the end of their strength; they could

no longer bear not to see each other! For Marc knew that Assia was back in Paris; and both had been warned by Annette of the days and hours she reserved for each of them, so as to spare them (said the good woman) the pain of meeting. On those days they artfully managed to see each other, near Annette's house, each trying to see without being seen. The best of it was that each thought himself the only one to indulge in this game of hide and seek. And every time that lying in ambush in the street, at a shop corner, either of them caught sight of the other's silhouette, their hearts leapt in their breasts, they all but rushed forward, or sank down, their legs giving way. Waves of heat and cold swept over them, and they went home exhausted, bloodless, with dry mouths, after which their whole day was wasted.

Such a state of things could not continue. The time was bound to come. Marc was at his mother's that day. Annette had at last made up her mind to suggest the possibility of a reconciliation; but Marc flatly refused, and roughly cut her words short. Assia was on the watch on the other side of the street opposite the front door; she waited, hidden behind a truck, for Marc to come out. But he took a long time. She could bear it no more. She crossed the road and went into the house. She only meant to be nearer. She waited, pricking up her ears, at the foot of the stairs. When she heard Annette's door, on the fourth floor, open, she would go out again. The door opened, and she went up. Her will had nothing to do with it, her legs carried her up. She went up like a somnambulist, not a trace of reflection left. But her hearing, sharpened, was a sounding box, amplifying the footsteps of him who was coming down. They saw each other halfway up. Assia had just reached the second landing. Three or four steps further up at a sharp corner

Marc was coming down. Their blood stood still; but their automatic steps did not stop. Instead of waiting on the landing, Assia in her confusion went on to the narrow turning which hardly left room for two people to pass each other. They passed, stiff and straight, brushing against each other, nearly slipping; Marc was squeezed against the wall, Assia almost hanging to the stair-rails. He held his breath. With closed mouth, she breathed heavily through her nose. . . .

They had passed. . . . Marc was now on the landing. They both turned back at once. They made a rush. . . . Marc seized Assia, who was two or three steps above him, below the hips. His face was level with her body, he buried it against her womb, the traitorous, the sacred womb—his home—lost, recovered! . . . And Assia, losing her balance, slid down the stairs and found herself on the landing again, mouth to mouth: all the dams had given way. . . .

At the noise of her slipping, a door opened on the next floor. They let go of each other. What were they to do? Where could they find shelter and disappear in the depths of the abyss of recovered joy? At his lodging? At hers? They had no strength left to walk. They could not have forced their way between the banks of the crowd in the streets. They did not want their love to be swallowed by that tide. . . . But one way of escape—they fled, upstairs, to the door on the fourth floor!

Annette opened it. She found them with fingers interlocked, devouring each other with their eyes, like Raphael's lovers in Trastevere. She hardly made a gesture of surprise. She laughed with joy, and effaced herself. They flung themselves inside. Nothing was said. "*Happy nations have no history. . . .*" Annette shut

the door of her room upon them. They stayed there all night.

The mother was in the other room, sitting by the child's bed. She whispered with the boy. He was greatly interested, curious, happy, too knowing. He fell asleep, laughing, holding grandmamma's fingers. . . .

And in the dark, Annette brooded over wounded happiness, and love kissing the wounds, the prodigal son, the daughter too—the wanderers who had lost and found their home. They had come back. She had them there, on the other side of the wall, in her bed. And the mother pressed her happy hands upon her womb. And, in her womb, upon her two children.

FLORENTINE MAY

PART II

XIX

HE caught her, on her sugar lips he kissed her, hard against his heart he pressed her. They remained together, slightly reclining, and of the rest they also did a little . . . Come, enough! I will tell no more . . ."

Thus says the folk tale of *Beautiful Maria-Ravenlocks*, that "raven-locked" Assia, full of tales, told Vania, more than once.

But this moon was not like the first honeymoon. It was no longer the honey of flowers, honey of the spring. But autumn honey (and yet, they were so young!), honey of the fir, of bitter savor, dark and golden. Love ripened by sorrow is the most ardent. It no longer spends itself in prodigal sport. It needs but the presence of the beloved, there by its side. It is never weary of feeling with every sense, with all that life has given us, that narrow body that outlines and limits us, but does not contain the whole of us. . . . "Beloved, beloved, is this really you? . . ."

"*Amantito, amantito*
Amante, amante.
My lashes hinder me from looking at you."[1]

And they fall back, exhausted.

[1] "*Las pestañas me estorban*
Para mirarte."

"Clinging to thy love
As lizards to the wall. . . ."[1]

The lizard sleeps with open eye. . . . The eye does not see, it drinks the sunlight. What sees is the warm side against the wall, it is all the long outstretched body. . . . "You? Are you there? . . ."

And they have not even strength left to move . . . An immense lassitude, centuries of lassitude to be recovered . . . Who would have thought that they had so many nights' sleep to make up. . . . Even when they thought they had slept, during those months of exile far from their own land, they wore themselves out in suffering and struggles, and insatiable regret gnawed them . . . Now that they had each other, had each other again, they had not even strength to take possession of their own; it was enough to know that it was there by their side:

"I sleep, I have got you, you have got me, I sleep. . . ."

Assia slept and slept . . . She would never finish sleeping. . . .

[1] *"Arrimato a mi querer*
Como las sulamanquesas
Se arriman a la pared."
Spanish folk *Coplas.*

XX

When they began to wake (intermittently, never both together), each contemplated the other, sleeping at his side. Like Psyche holding the lamp, they scrutinized the lover's body, and the face, like a book of wounded love, which betrays itself in sleep. Each was shocked at reading the secrets of the grief and revolt which, during the months of separation, had left the marks of their claws on that familiar face, which was hardly to be recognized. It was the same, and it was different . . . What was changed? . . . And as each questioned the mirror of that face, the face of the sleeper, he found there by reverberation the reflection of his own: the face watching and observing was not the same, it was different . . . What was changed? . . . In both a work of deep tillage had been done. The plowshare had passed over them, and the seeds had sprouted . . .

First of all, the first corn: another love. Yesterday's was burnt. Another was born. A love made up of gratitude and passionate abnegation. For, at the price of their suffering, they had proved what they were to each other, and that one could not live without the other. The pride that set them in opposition was broken. And what joy that it was broken! The door opened between their hearts.

"I am your dwelling place. Live in me! I am deserted if you do not fill me . . . Ah! what a marvel, as Gorki says, to love a human creature! . . . Why this one? I do not know. All I know is that this is the one I love. And his love has raised me from the dead . . . And I, it was I, who crucified him! . . ." Assia, bend-

ing over Marc's sleeping body, kissed the wound of the lance in his side. "May I never make him suffer again! . . ."

And in Marc's eyes, when awake, she read the same fear of hurting her, the same tender solicitude. Both, having been wounded, were immediately aware of the least quiver of the beloved's skin. These attentions, shown in a thousand imperceptible ways, modified the depths of their souls. Each tried secretly to be that which would please the other. Each repressed the natural tendencies which might jar those of the other. They had both acquired a feeling of mutual humility to which they had not been used. There was no question now of one being in the right against the other. It was better to be in the wrong oneself. Assia no longer tried to force Marc beyond his limitations, or before the proper time; in these days of reunion she found her joy in adapting her steps to the rhythm of the beloved's. It was enough for her that they walked together . . .

"Take your own time! Don't hurry! I am with you, we have time enough! . . ."

Even if Marc was not able, without doing violence to his own nature, to reach the goal which seemed natural to Assia, Assia no longer cared to reach the goal without him. Her first task, her first duty and her happiness (her heart knew it now) was to help the beloved to realize his own nature. He was her child, her real child—more than the little boy. The little one was produced once for all; but the grown-up child she carried always in her womb, she was making him, brooding over him, she was shaping him with her tenderness, and her blood . . . She remembered Annette's words, in the days after the rupture.

"We are the mother. We must have pity on our child . . ."

She reminded Annette of it when they were alone:

"It's true. Even during the embrace, the strongest feeling (the most obscure; but I see clearly into him now) is the feeling of being the mother; and the supreme sweetness is to rock him in our body, he who takes us while surrendering himself—our grown-up child."

Annette said:

"It does not do to show it too clearly. A wise mother knows how to spare the pride of her little one, who thinks himself grown up. She must learn the good lesson of serving him as a field for experience where he can clumsily exercise his growing strength against her. She bears his injustice with indulgence, she even finds a secret pleasure in it. Of him we love, our child, we make a man, he becomes a man at our expense. And that is love. Love begins with a wound."

"It was I who wounded him, my big boy. I have not been a wise mother."

"One only learns to be that after failing in it."

"For you the wise virgins are last year's foolish virgins? You would not have closed the door to them?"

"I would sooner have closed it on the wise virgins, who refused to lend their oil. I am not a good evangelist."

"Yes, you lent me your oil, and my lamp is alight again. The bridegroom has come back. I've got him, I've got him, and I'll keep him, I will not let my candle be blown out again. . . . *Au clair de la lune!* . . . I watch over my fire."

Marc watched the little guardian who bent over him so faithfully. He clearly saw her vigilance in sheltering the relighted flame of love between her hands, and the rosy light of the lamp on her tender, anxious face. Assia's

care in protecting Marc's liberty, and in not hindering him in his development, was not lost upon him. He was touched that she should seem willing to sacrifice her own law to him. He was not the man to accept it. It only made him more conscious of the duties he was contracting towards her. Her act of faith in him obliged him to make himself worthy of her—not to disappoint her expectation. To march on. And to the end! Not that he could ever sacrifice the sincerity of his nature to her. He knew (and she knew it too, by now) that it would be betraying her, if out of weakness for her he should betray himself. His sincerity was his marriage portion, the common property of the pair. He must watch over it, but by taking care that it should not remain unproductive, that this interior force should fulfill itself, that the torrent should cut its channel through the hills. He must solve the enigma of the contradictory needs of the spirit. And from the conflicting laws of his soul bring forth the wider law which embraced them all.

It was here that the unexpected virtue of love was revealed—the new love which renewed Marc's blood, through his wound. For, by ridding him of certain warm illusions of blind life, of the selfishness of the flesh, of the folly of monopolizing another being—love led him to strip himself of that most fatal selfishness of spirit—the selfishness of his ideologies and absolute convictions. It helped him to pass from one plane of life to another, from the individual to the social plane. As in these first months of *Vita Nuova,* Assia found her natural joy in subordinating her pride and independence to loving service of Marc—Marc was moving towards the sacrifice of his chaotic individualism, bending beneath the pressure of the demands of social action and combat which Assia's love unwittingly whispered to him. She had no need

to ask it of him. It was enough for her to become himself, so that he might become her and find in her, as if they were his own, the vigorous elementary instincts which were essential to Assia's nature. Needless to say, such a blending of two minds was possible only in the paroxysm of the early days when the two bodies had found each other again. Later on the bond had to be relaxed, and the independent course of two interior lives move onward side by side. Such is the law. But from those moments when they had penetrated each other to the center, and blended to the point of being more the other than themselves, they had retained an impregnation of the soul which could never be effaced. The taste remained in their mouths. Even if they wished to wash it off their tongues (there were times when such haunting savored of fever) they could have found no water which would cleanse their palates. They had to live with their ill—with their good—each with the soul of the other grafted to his body. They could feel it throbbing like a tooth. A tooth to be cut. New teeth. Like young animals they sought for something to gnaw, to cut their teeth upon. They were hungry. Hungry for action.

XXI

There was a difference between the two. Assia's hunger was all pleasure; for it was healthy and care-free: "I am hungry, I eat . . . So much the worse for what is eaten!" But Marc's hunger could not forget the right-to-live of the eaten, as of the eater. All life in progress walks over victims. No really new society can be built save upon the ruins of that which preceded it. And those ruins are not stones, they are bodies with blood in them. To know the taste of that blood, Marc had but to lick his own wounds; in the combat imposed upon his will, he found himself, by his very nature, on both sides: the blows he gave, he received himself. The cruelty of the combat was doubly felt by him, striker and stricken. And the ideology of the combat clashed with his own: that mass proletarian spirit offended him personally in his aristocratic instincts of an intellectual individualist; he strove in vain: he had to believe in the privileges of the intellect and caste which were identified with himself; if he ceased to believe, he would feel lost! . . .

Marc succeeded in saving himself only by an ascetic reaction, which punished him and his caste for their recognized unworthiness by condemning him to the hard service of the proletarian class, and to the methods of combat which that service implied. He had worn the old garments of destructive or sterile individualism till they were threadbare. He had seen and touched in his intellectual companions the prostitution of those ideas which were dear to him: liberty of spirit, and non-violence. All the ideologists of the bourgeoisie, great and small, had commerce with those ideas; such prostitute ideas procured

for them cheaply the voluptuous pleasure of a magnanimous and comfortable intelligence that takes no risks. There were some to suit every hide: objectivism, idealism, æstheticism, honor, pity, respect, virtue, individual freedom of conscience, humanity. They had passed through so many beds that they could accommodate themselves to any shape: all minds could fit into them. Thus the intellectuals escaped any painful contact with reality, rough hands, dirty hands, and blood. They made use of their ideas, their prostitutes, to escape the responsibilities and risks of social action. With the best of them, it was not only cowardice, fear of blood; it was more especially secret hurt pride: they were quite willing, if necessary, to devote themselves to the cause of the people, but on condition that they should not lose their place of honor, that they remain the privileged elect who direct the uneducated masses, the professors who teach *ex cathedra*. Under the fiction of a democracy, they would not admit, though they dared not say so, the insolent equality of the proletariats, who accepted them, but in the ranks. If they had been forced by necessity, as in the U.S.S.R., to coöperate with the masses, they could not have restrained themselves from conspiring, in their hearts or in fact, to establish an oligarchy of technicians, either material or intellectual. The proletarian or petit-bourgeois origin of the majority did not prevent them from assuming a patronizing attitude towards those whom they regarded as inferiors. In all times, the most disdainful and hardest towards the people have been those who, born of the people, have raised themselves by suppleness or by the strength of their wrists. The stewards of the *ancien régime* were the watchdogs of the privileged classes. Nowadays, the intellectuals and technicians are the watchdogs of the bourgeois class. Marc knew them through and through;

and what had helped him to read their secret thoughts was that he had found the same thought at the back of his own head; he had been obliged to extirpate it. And that was also why he fought them with greater energy: for in them it was himself, one of his "selves," a "self" abjured, that he was fighting.

In a night of feverish struggle with himself, one of those *Quatre août* nights in which one frees oneself of privileges, Marc freed himself from his individual liberty, and took upon himself the task of serving the common action of the masses who are bent on renewing the social order. But his mind was not clear upon the position he should take up in the order of battle. For he could not get beyond the idea of sacrifice. He balked at the idea of violence. By an effect of the same passionate reaction against his instincts which made him harshly subdue his individualism, his mind refused to accept, for himself, the use of that violence to which he was by temperament too prone. He knew by experience that if he set foot in it, he would be drowned. And he had good reason to believe that the same thing was true of the majority. Violence is too strong a wine for men. One glass is enough to make them lose control of their reason. And yet the Europe of to-day cannot act without it. It has been used to that alcohol for too many centuries. What can be done to cure the habit? Words are of no avail. Only the example of action. Only sacrifice. But sacrifice in the service of the order of battle.

Such a decision appealed to the most heroic and purest energies. But it lacked that touch of light: the joy that alone crowns action with a halo. This great effort to purify himself, to sacrifice himself, to renounce, wrapped the young man in secret melancholy. He hid it from Assia; and Assia did not notice it: for her nature, perhaps

no less complex in substance, but less thin-skinned, took little account of such scruples in action. She respected the problems which were tormenting Marc; but she left him to solve them alone. It sufficed that she was ready, in advance, to follow him in whatever line of action he decided upon. Love gave her confidence in Marc. But let him choose, and let him act! To this woman in full vigor, everything, even love, was action. She was a tree turned to the sun, life in progress, the flood of day. Let us conquer the day! Day after day, let us seize the day. Introspection is out of date.

If Marc wished to tell another of his mental struggles, he turned to his mother; already raised above action to the waist, and bathing in it from the knees to the soles of her feet, she was well fitted to understand the tragic duality of her son. She saw him still impassioned for life, but no longer quite the dupe of life: he judged it as he clasped it. And the fullness of his flame rose upwards, through life, towards a future, a beyond, which he could not see, but which he wanted and sought for, like a blind serpent stretching out. The son spoke little to his mother of that secret life. They exchanged it with each other by contact. Thus their blood reached the same degree of temperature; it attained a common point of equilibrium. This was the chief benefit of their unfinished colloquies: for Annette could read her boy clearly, but she could not read further for him, she could not advise him as to what he ought to do.

Thus he stood between the two women who loved him, but who could not help him to go forward except by going with him; they were ready to accompany him wherever he might go, but they could not or would not say to him: "Go there!" They waited for him to direct. He thought it just. He was the man. But to have to

decide for both them and himself did not simplify his problem. Each of the three had his own law. How find the beautiful chord in which the three notes would give out their full harmony?

While waiting for intelligence to discover it, instinct, wiser and more sensitive, was leading them towards it. The secret exchange of their natures imparted to Marc from Assia the fiery sap, the impulse to action, from Annette the calm front that holds back the flood-gate of action. And to both women he was the stable point, the tree to which their vines could cling. He wedded them to each other.

XXII

They compared their experiences during the months of separation. Assia's, in Central Europe, were heavy with meaning, since from her listening post she had surprised fragments of the "Secrets of the Gods." They completed the revelations which Annette had gathered through her intimacy with Timon. They confirmed Marc's intuitions and apprehensions in his wanderings like a lost dog on the pavement of Paris.

It was clear that Europe and the world were delivered over to the hidden might of monstrous industrial and financial powers. They manipulated the states, democracies and Fascisms; made everything serve their purpose: kings of the Balkans, princes bribed to sell their people, helped; so did the heroes of dagger, bludgeon and castor oil, *condottieri* and *duci* with eyes blazing, and great jaws breathing war and pogroms; and also the noble fathers of the Immortal Principles of '89, those overripe pears with their pettifoggery about Parliaments; Hitler, Horthy, Mussolini and Pilsudski;—and why not? the loud-speakers of Paris, Prague, London, Geneva, and Washington. Everything can be used, brigandage and idealism, noble candor and infamy; it is only a matter of paying the price: glory, money, or crime. Something for every taste! The simplest and the most artful were caught: once a finger was snared in the machinery, the whole animal was drawn in. Fear completed the capture of which flattery and little friendly presents had been the bait. The big fish were caught on the hook.

The game would have been won but for two conditions: these world-masters should have agreed among

themselves as to the division of the world; they should have united against the only formidable enemy who was preparing the world's counter-offensive: the U.S.S.R., which was arming behind the red-hot steel wall of its great Plans. These conditions were elementary. A child would have understood them. But these stout-limbed brawny giants of money and business, as Timon used to say, had very little brains. Their great, short-sighted, bloodshot eyes could not succeed in turning from their antagonistic passions, their vanities, and the rival interests of the day. For years they had been incapable of presenting a united front to the enemy. These world buyers let themselves be bought; they mutually betrayed each other for a stolen cake, a contract concluded with the wise enemy, which benefited them at the expense of their rival. Thus, they had let grow the huge proletarian factory which day and night was forging their ruin.

But, at the eleventh hour (and the first quarter had even struck) they had, at last, perceived the shadow of the factory lengthening over them. And they wanted to form a union. The Holy Union. All their trumpets and church bells sounded it. It was late in the day! The earth was quaking. The first shocks were splitting the main walls of capitalism. Several massive pillars had fallen suddenly: Stinnes, Timon, Loewenstein . . . Those that remained, the most powerful, must stand together. Assia had witnessed the attempts to group together the great industrial trusts, and the Franco-German Fascisms. Other tentacles were reaching out to each other under the seas, between the Anglo-Saxon countries, the British Empire and the U. S. A., to glue the Octopus together again; bird-lime was spread for the *bravi* who were for sale and the ready-for-anything Fascists of Italy and the Balkans. A cloud of spies and *agents provocateurs*

swarmed like green flies in every corner. France maintained on her very soil a White Army of mercenaries, cannon-fodder, ready to be sent at any moment here or there, in the interior or abroad. And between Paris, London, and Moscow, through Prague, Riga, and Warsaw, there was a coming and going of secret agents, who insinuated themselves into the U.S.S.R. to disorganize, cause strikes in the works, foment rebellions, and lay a concrete road for the attacking war-chariots of the Invasion, heralded six months ahead by the silly crowing of the White generals and the Dutch petrol-king.

Western "Liberalism" made no move. And the Socialists, angered and hurt by the unbridled polemics of Communist bawlers, feigned ignorance. A convenient deafness kept them from intervening. Yet they must be forced to hear! And so must those fat and quiescent intellectuals of the left parties who did not wish to appear indifferent to the murder of a new world, but were still more unwilling to compromise themselves in its defense. They were deaf and crying *"Baa!"* like Maître Pathelin's shepherd.

"Wait a bit! I'll soon shake you up! The howls of S.O.S. will pierce your ears at last. . . ."

But where install the instrument?

Marc, with a few brave young men who were not afraid to take risks (they had everything to lose, nothing to gain), was among the first, in France, to organize fighting groups in defense of the U.S.S.R. Assia had done nothing to persuade him to it. Nothing but to be, and be loved. For he caught her thought, like the perfume of her clothes. Between two night-companions the thought that needs expression to be caught is a scentless flower. Assia's perfume of acacia rose warm from her garden. She was too knowing to let Marc see that the

odor of her thoughts clung to the hairs of his body. She seemed to follow Marc. In short, both were following the track which led to their true goal, to that right action which is the maturity of every full life. It was their proper line of development. It was adjusted to that of the epoch, marching towards the necessary Revolution. In the great upheavals of the earth, little streams follow the same slope as the rivers, and all mingle their waters. Even Annette, who by reason of her age and mental struggles had reached level ground where the current runs quietly, participated in the progress, and, reflecting a calmer sky, moved in the same direction.

With the help of his old employer Marc added to the book-binding workshop a little printing-press, from which issued irregularly pamphlets sounding the alarm, or dealing with social combat, translations of Marx, Lenin, and masters of international action, books of documentary evidence, and appeals and pamphlets which Marc edited. Assia was naturally his translator from Russian and German; and sometimes Annette from English or Italian. But she was not so zealous; she lagged over her translations, especially when they were books on economics or social theory; she played truant with little Vania, whom she had not given up after his mother's return; also she was taken up again by her dream life, as her day declined; they would catch her idling absent-eyed like a schoolgirl before her book or copybook: they had to rouse her:

"Now then sleepyhead! Is that how you guard our field? . . ."

Assia loved to hustle her. And it did not displease Annette to be hustled. She returned, but leisurely, to her field. Whence she returned, she told no one, though Assia teased her to find out. The galloping activity of her two colts amused her. She did not try to moderate it.

She opened other fields to them. Her old liberalism and her memories of Rumania made her more keenly alive to the Fascist outrages in Latin countries. She had kept up friendships there, and she helped to make her son's bookshop one of the centers of Italian anti-Fascist emigration. They brought it their custom, richer in discussions than money. It was not easy for them to agree with Communism. They even had some trouble in agreeing among themselves. They exhausted themselves in efforts to rebuild a democratic edifice undermined by the Great War, an edifice at which Revolutions and Counter-Revolutions were simultaneously firing their cannon. They were doubly exiled, from their own country, and from their own times. Annette understood them, though for herself she had accomplished the renouncement of much that she, with her generation, had believed in and loved, the ideals of her youth, which she had seen grow old with her, and which would give place (it is the law of life) to the ideals of another youth. She was the intermediary between these two epochs of liberty, and she tried to make them mutually esteem, on the one side the dying grandeur of the old bourgeois idealism issued from the ruins of the Bastille, and on the other the renewal of the world by the heroic materialism of the proletarian Revolution. She was not one to bother about set names. Materialism or idealism, let the fire of life take any name it chose! All that mattered was that it should blaze.

Marc, like his mother, had a tendency to sympathize with the *fuoruscite:* the tragedy of their fate, aliens to the times, was secretly akin to him, though his deliberate will saved him from it. He made himself their champion. Assia thought her Don Quixote was defending a lost cause. But she had laid it upon herself never again to hinder the quests of her knight on Rosinante; and

though she laughed at them, she loved his long legs, and his lance thrusts. The latter brought Marc the gratitude of the exiles, and the honor he could have done without of attracting the attention of the Fascist agents in France. The little deserted street where the bookshop lay was enlivened by certain strollers who took an extraordinary interest in the humble shop windows of the district; the bookshop benefited by long visits from customers who turned over the books interminably before making up their minds to buy; and Marc received, even in his home, Italian admirers of his articles who, with too emotional gratitude, displayed a vehement anti-Fascism, in words which made Assia prick up her ears as she stood in the passage, mounting guard before her big boy's door. For he was not cautious enough; he had to be reminded that in politics it is better to listen than speak, before acting . . . A year of flies! They swarmed over Europe in those days. Those of the Italian secret police were particularly harassing in Paris. The anti-Fascist colony had to be ever on the defensive against them: for the ignominy of people whose honor had seemed well established would be suddenly revealed: even men, friends whom they thought themselves sure of, were found too late to be beaters for the Fascist secret police, who had come to pick out victims, and push them into the toils. So great had grown the appetite for lucre and infamy in the rotten post-war society, especially among the young thrown out of their course. Assia had a nose for this which was rarely at fault; and more than once she singed the wings of various insects who tried to intrude themselves on Marc; a certain tone, a certain look was enough to make them take themselves off: they took care not to persist. But an hour's absence was enough: Marc could

hardly resist appeals to his pride or pity; he was too ready to share his purse and his confidence.

The Communist camp was hardly less dangerous. The war had taught governments to make use of the shameful vices hidden in the bellies of so many "honest men"—"honest Iagos"—who are eager to nourish them, or (better still!) to be nourished by them. Their aptitudes, hitherto unknown, for betraying, spying, and denouncing, were richly cultivated. Following the experienced footsteps of the ancient Holy Russia of the Tsars, and of the grand master of political perfidy, the Intelligence Service, the prop of the British Empire, the leaders of French democracy now made use of the *agent provocateur* as a method of government; they had some impartially in every camp of the opposition, right and left—in the Revolutionary party, and among the *Messieurs du Roy*. The machinery of a political police had grown formidably in fifteen years. Following the example of the Intelligence Service it aimed at becoming a State within a State. One might already foresee the day when in order to remain in office the Prime Minister would be obliged to make himself the first copper of the State (or the second: the under-Chiappe). Liberty had but another hour to breathe before they wrung her neck. Let us imitate Marc, and make the most of the hour!

By his attacks Marc risked more than once manhandling by the police and even assassination—one night when he was coming home he was nearly killed, in the shadow of a doorway, by licensed waylayers. But they had reckoned without Assia's revolver; she forestalled them and fired into the group: the wounded man was not eager to make himself known. And later on, without Marc's or Annette's getting wind of it, Sylvie appeared on the scene.

Assia had warned her: there was no love lost between

the two, but they sealed an alliance for the defense of their boy. Sylvie had friends in all ranks of society; some in the press, and some in Parliament. She enjoyed the privileges accorded in Paris to certain female sentinels of fashion, gallantry, and wit—especially when they are getting on in years; to the Parisian nose well-known women, like wine, acquire more bouquet with age. Sylvie made use of this preëminence, and of her sharp tongue, to make the gentlemen of the "Tour Pointue" understand that they must keep their hands off her nephew: private preserves, 'ware scandal! The League of the Rights of Man was warned. And even old Roger Brissot [1] was made to get a move on! (If Marc had known, he would have strangled Sylvie.)

Brissot was then Keeper of the Seals, gorged with honors and wealth, the chief pillar of twenty administrative councils of the most powerful financial companies who shared amongst them the power of France and the spoils of the world. A word from him was equal to a command. He had come to the end of his life, suffering from a disease—cancer of the liver—which would soon procure him national obsequies; he was disgusted with everything, but still greedy; he bore his existence like a gaping void which he vainly strove to fill. The Pantheon, which he coveted, would not have been enough to fill the hole. Glory in stone belongs to death. He needed life—the life we leave behind us. He was leaving nothing but his speeches, which oozed boredom and stank of death. He was well aware of Marc's existence. His attempts to annex that living flesh, issued from himself, had met with insulting refusals—not even direct (Marc had not honored him with a word) but by humiliating intermediaries. Brissot's present feeling for the man came very near to hatred. He would have liked to strike him out of his thoughts. And even if Marc had been struck out of existence, who knows but that Brissot would have been secretly relieved? But too many people had heard, through Sylvie, of Marc's shameful and renounced paternity. Brissot was held back by pride, by the secret control of public opinion which he feared. Short of playing the Roman Brutus, sacrificing his offspring on the altar of duty (for all his skill in rhetoric: such an oratorical exploit would have been a tough morsel to get anyone to swallow!) he was bound to protect his offspring from the ambushes of the State . . . *"L'Etat c'est moi . . ."* He was of it.

[1] See "Annette and Sylvie," and "Mother and Son."

He did what was needed. He was not really a bad man. He would have liked to love his son, and above all to be loved by him. He might be a corrupt statesman; as a family man he would have had his virtues, like the majority of French bourgeois. Perhaps, if Marc and Annette had been willing to accept him, they might have had a good effect on him. But Marc and Annette had been pitiless. We cannot praise them for it. Inhumanity is too natural in young men. And as to women, even the best has often dark windings of the heart, impenetrable hardness, resentments she will not own to herself, so that she may not be forced to discuss them. Annette believed, in all good faith, that she never thought of Roger Brissot: she wished him no ill, since he was dead to her. But that was the most terrible thing: subconsciously she had killed him; she refused him the air of the living. There is unknown crime in many hearts which would be horrified at crime. And the best and most generous are not the least dangerous. They do not hate. They suppress. Better hatred than that calm annihila-

tion. Even a Brissot was incapable of it. He had not sufficient personal energy. His hates, like his loves, were incoherent and only skin deep. He had orders given that Marc should not be interfered with.

Marc never knew what he owed to his father, nor the complicity of the two gossips: his Assia and Sylvie. They took good care not to tell him of it. But the secret brought them nearer to each other. Without retracting her animosity toward the intruder who had returned to the nest, Sylvie packed away her resentments in her bottom drawer (perhaps, some day, she would have occasion to take them out); and she condescended to reappear more frequently in the young couple's home. The freedom of her speech and her humor were in tune with Assia's; they laughed heartily together, though they knew that peace was not signed but open truce and alliance: they had their Marc to defend.

So Marc went on selling and publishing books and pamphlets of propaganda, anti-Fascist, anti-Imperialist, pro-Soviet, pro-Gandhist, etc. . . . Without deciding to take up a clearly defined position among these various lines of battle, he was trying to make himself a link between the armies, and to lead them (Utopian dream!) to make common front against the massive forces of Reaction. Of course, he did not succeed; and the only unity created between these troops of Resisters and Non-Resisters, liberals and violents, was created by the official order that all should be smothered under the cloak of silence. No newspaper ever mentioned them, not one of the publications could have been found in any kiosk or bookshop. But they were, none the less, read and circulated under cover. Marc's bitter and fiery genius, matured by combat and sorrow—allied to the spirited verve of Assia, who did not sign but coupled her mind with

Marc's—soon captured an independent public, which conducted its own publicity from mouth to mouth. That is the best method. It blazes over all obstacles like the hill-top fires that transmitted the signal in bygone days. The signal reached isolated watchers in the most varied and distant surroundings. Correspondence began to pour in, and voluntary subscriptions. Annette rejoiced to see her son's circle of action growing wider, without dwelling on the thought of where such action might lead him. She was not unaware of the dangers. She did not wish him to expose himself to them. But she would not have liked him to shirk them. She deluded herself with the hope that dangerous action was not for the morrow. . . .

Besides, there was in her, as in all strong characters, a substratum of fatalism, which agrees with the will ("I will what ought to be: what ought to be will be"). The current of the stream bears us along. We have but to hold the tiller of the boat. Tiller, boat, and current are ourselves. The will of the stream be done! . . .

XXIII

Danger was remote for the moment. Marc's action still seemed inoffensive to the country that gave him shelter. It was of a generous and general nature, to which the hypocrisy of a democratic State could skillfully accommodate itself. The chief aim of Marc and his group was to defend the rights of the oppressed and exiled of all Europe, to be, or to create around themselves a bastion for liberties against universal reaction. France, favored by victory which assured her a privileged economy for a few years longer in the misery and fever of the rest of the Continent, could allow herself the luxury of an ideological liberty that cost her nothing. Even her policy of capitalist imperialism found in this opposition a justification for the eyes of Europe. It was a screen behind which she hid the equivocation of a democracy, its cheeks blown out with noble principles, which secretly subsidized the Fascisms of Yugo-Slavia, Poland, and the Balkans, and maintained on its own soil prætorians, White Guards. Marc and his friends became a nuisance only when they attacked this lie. But it was so managed that their invectives should make no stir. In their ranks, there was no lack of good watchdogs of the official lie who succeeded in defending it from the youthful intransigeance of these disrespectful sons of Mother France and in creating salutary divisions among the opponents. The little handful of rebels were too few and too unknown to cause anxiety. To persecute them would only have drawn attention to them. The government tolerated them—and kept an eye on them.

But the intercrossing of human destinies was about to bring Marc's into contact with other destinies, richer in experience and influence, which would reënforce him, in reënforcing themselves with him.

XXIV

It was at this time that there came back into Annette's life—and through her into her son's—an old friendship, lost, supposed to be dead, and now ripened and filtered of its impurities: the friendship of Julien Davy, her fiancé when she was thirty.[1]

She was ill at the time and confined to her room. Since she had contracted pneumonia in the marshes of Rumania, though she seemed cured, she suffered every winter from a recurrent and insidious form of influenza which, though apparently harmless, in the long run was undermining her robust constitution. Meanwhile it showed itself only in mild attacks, which forced her to take a fortnight's rest. During those weeks of enforced idleness when she had time to read, dream, and wander in the byways of the past, Annette chanced to meet her old companion of the dead years, who kept apart, like herself. She generally avoided these old paths: too much of her fleece —loves, regrets, remorse, dreams, worries—was caught, here and there, on the bushes. No need to hunt for it: it is like the floating dandelion seeds that stick to one's clothes and cannot be got rid of. And, thank God, one has quite enough to do brushing off the dust of every day without gathering up that of the past! Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof. . . .

But when by accident the machine is momentarily at a standstill, the mind goes on turning like a squirrel in its cage; and finds itself back in the past. Annette found the old Annette, and her old lover, her Theseus who had abandoned Ariadne—Julien Davy.

[1] See *Summer*.

It was not the first time, in twenty years, that she had come across his name. Though she had not sufficient leisure to keep up with scientific publications (and if one ceases to follow it for a time, science goes at such a rate that one has to pant to catch up with it), she had sometimes seen his name on reviews and books. It had always given her an imperceptible shock: her first impulse was to turn away: "I have seen nothing." But within a day or two she was back before the bookshop window; and there her indifferent glance did not hesitate . . . She went off. The title of the book was now inscribed in her brain—the author's titles likewise. He was a professor in the College de France. He had worked well. . . . She had a pang at her heart, but she was glad. She would have been sorry to leave those she had loved behind. Julien was progressing. . . .

But in what direction? She had never tried to find out. Mention him to anyone else? . . . No! She supposed that he had continued his course in the old traditionalist Catholic spirit of his family. During the war she had been too taken up with her own action and passions to notice the stifled echo of Julien's voice in Paris. And Julien was not one to do anything to prevent his voice from being stifled! He was too proud to pit his lungs against the chorus of a hundred throats. He did not speak for others. He spoke for himself.

Chance had rather belatedly brought some scattered words of his speech to Annette. She was still with Timon, typing an article for him. The door of his private room was open; while dictating, he talked to one person or another who came in and out. The name of Julien Davy emerged from this confusion. And Annette pricked up her ears. She did not miss a word of what Timon said about that "defeatist," that "damned usher of the Prussian

College, who was passing from Prussian blue to Kremlin red."

"I'll give him a swift kick! . . ."

Without interrupting her typing, she asked:

"What has he done?"

Between two phrases of dictation he replied:

"What does it matter to you?"

She answered:

"I know him. And esteem him."

Timon's visitor expected to hear his fury turned upon the imprudent secretary who dared to contradict his opinion. But the habitués knew the power of the typist over the tyrant. He crushed his cigar on the desk with a bang of his fist; and choked:

"Ah! You know him, do you? Ah! You esteem him? That b— b—!"

He swallowed his smoke with a grunt:

"Well, so do I! . . ."

But he added:

"But I'll have his skin, all the same!"

She asked once more:

"What has he done?"

"Since you know him, why do you ask?"

She explained, in measured words, that she had known him a long time ago, but had lost sight of him. He was on the track at once. She felt his mocking glance searching her. But, for the moment, he said no more; he related briefly, with his usual brutality, but without insulting her friend, that during the war Davy had played the inopportune part of pacifist and European; and, since the peace (the vice was incarnate in him!) he had taken the opposite part of advocate of the men-with-knives-in-their-mouths, and champion of anti-Europe (of the U.S.S.R.—as Timon judged it). And he concluded:

"Are you satisfied? What do you say to it?"

She replied:

"I say that if he has maintained two opposite theses, one or the other must be yours."

He burst out laughing:

"Do you think so?"

She smiled:

"No, I don't."

She knew very well that theses did not interest him. It was the profits. And better still, gain or loss, it was the game. Theses are for those fools of idealists, the pawns who are moved about the chess-board. Then is it worth while raving against them? . . . It's all part of the game . . .

Afterwards, Timon returned to the subject more than once, when he was alone with Annette; and though he did it without much delicacy, his teasing was not unkind; he wanted to know . . . And (how strange!) that Rivière, which had never given up to her closest intimates the secret sleeping under her waters, calmly opened herself to this brigand. Without the least embarrassment, with a smile on her lips, but with a grain of irony, she told him all about her misadventure when she was thirty. And he never thought of abusing her confidence; he chaffed her about it, now and then; but it was a friendly slap. She was the first to laugh at herself. For all that, the subject was serious, or had been! It must not be touched with dirty hands. Timon's heavy paws did not touch it. And, without any request from Annette, Julien Davy was never attacked in the newspaper, his name was tacitly ignored. Timon contented himself with saying to Annette:

"Hey! that idiot of yours, he's a famous hand at missing the train! . . . Contradict that!"

Annette did not contradict it. And that the chief should

say "he has missed it," made her feel a little avenged. . . . Did she want vengeance then? . . . What! after fifteen years of complete forgetfulness, over which so many other passions had passed, the mark still remained, and she smarted? . . . What woman can ever forget a wound inflicted on her pride, or her heart?

But Annette would not have wished for any other revenge. She was contented with that. If only Julien could have thought what the chief had just said! . . . Oh! just once or twice in his life . . . That would be quite enough! She would not have liked this regret to be a thorn under his feet. . . . After all, she had not scrupled to find *Ersätze* for him.

"And he, himself, poor boy, was probably only an *Ersatz* for the one we seek for all our lives and never find. . . . It is best that we should each have gone our own way."

All the same, Annette was not sorry that Julien's route was not so very far from her own.

XXV

A quite platonic satisfaction! She made no attempt to draw nearer to it, nor even to find out exactly what it was. She had read nothing of Julien's until this illness gave her some leisure. Perhaps it also gave her a slight fever, propitious to this looking backwards.

And so, having succeeded, with an assumption of indifferent curiosity, in procuring through her young daughter-in-law one of Julien's books, then another, then the whole lot ("When you are in bed you must resign yourself to being bored!"), she spent days with a blissfully troubled heart. Assia, seeing her yawning with sleepy eyes, said:

"Go to sleep! It would be much better for you."

She docilely closed her eyes upon her joy.

What was there that so moved and rejoiced her in those books, nearly all on science and history, where other eyes could see only the mirror of a disinterested mind, reflecting the laws of objective reality? She saw, first of all, the intrepid spirit which bore no resemblance to the vacillations of the timid spirit which she had known.—"Which bore no resemblance?"—Which resembled! Yes, indeed! She alone had already perceived in him, under his trembling, the stifled impulses of his mind towards heroic truth; and she had brooded over them with her wings. She recognized her chickens! His and hers. They had broken the shell with their beaks. The real Julien.

"My Julien. . . . Here he is at last! He is born! . . . And from what womb? . . . From mine, from mine! I have borne him and given him birth. He is the son of my love and my suffering. I recognize him. I recognize myself . . ."

How could she help recognizing him? Sometimes the words were her own. She remembered when she had spoken them to him. . . . And that he should have repeated them fifteen years later! . . . Sometimes it was less than words, and infinitely more: it was the inflexions of her own voice; what he said was his own, but he had borrowed her mouth to speak. His lips had retained its flavor.

And she lay quite still in her bed for days, with closed eyes, bathing in joyous gratitude.

"Dear Julien! . . ."

Was there not a good deal of pride in this, and through pride, a good deal of illusion? . . . Illusion? . . . No, she was quite sure! She was the only person who knew it. But she did know. She could not be deceived. . . . As to pride, she did not deny it. Truly, there was some pride. A little. . . . A good deal? . . .

"Perhaps more than I admit! It's true, I am proud, in all my actions, at bottom, even when I think myself most devoid of all personal consideration, when I will to be so, when I say to myself: 'I am dead to myself, at last!' . . . I am not dead. The old woman lives still. . . . And how! How she claims her due! . . . Her Julien. . . . To think that I have had him, these last ten years, and that I never knew it! . . ."

For however much he had grown, he was hers. She did not think herself equal to him. She felt how much Julien's mind had gone beyond her. She followed him from afar, to such and such a milestone on the way. Beyond that she confessed she could not follow. It would have taken too much time to catch up the advance which he and science had made beyond her, in fifteen years. But still it flattered her pride. He had gone so far, he had grown so great, her little one! . . .

And she dreamed of what her life might have been with him. She dreamed of it, for hours, lying still, in the hollow of her bed. She felt tenderness, sadness, and amusement. Her life was unraveled and reknit again, as she dreamed . . .

Enough of dreams! She was cured. . . . "*Life is a dream.* . . ." Perhaps! . . . But it is a dream in which bread does not drop into our mouths without being earned. . . . She jumped out of bed. And to work!

"My little Julien, we will meet again, when we reach the end! But that won't be to-morrow. . . ."

She thought no more about it. But Marc said to her:

"You have grown younger."

She laughed:

"People like us can get a rest only when they are ill."

XXVI

Julien had never rested. He was one of those who do not know how to rest. . . . He could not live without working. Yet he had no need to work for a living. But he needed work to fill his mental life. That intensive brain work blocked his door to other thoughts. It blocked it badly. The door swung ajar, draughts got in. Julien was never warm.

But he no longer sat still shivering in the old chimney-corner in the Saint Sulpice quarter, as in the days when Annette knew him. He had come out of the house of the past. And he had flung off and left behind him all his heavy clothing of bourgeois prejudices. Annette had seen correctly when she read his books.

It had taken no little heroism for this French petit bourgeois, timid and fearful, dominated by an autocratic mother, cramped by the out-of-date clothes of the age-long spiritual convictions and morals of a right-minded conservative and clerical family, to dare, past the age of thirty-five, to examine himself thoroughly and slowly, without cheating his own mind, to strip himself of all that he judged to be false, after he had believed in it. Afterwards he had felt terribly naked. And how could he show himself thus before the eyes of those who had known him when he was dressed in the same lies with which they always covered their own offended modesty—how could he face those who will not see the world's nakedness, who are horrified and cover the truth of the spirit with a fig leaf?

Julien's case was all the more serious because he was not one of the sorry unfrocked who compensate themselves for what they have left by getting lodging in the

shop next door and serving the rival passions of anti-clericalism and "free thought." He stood alone in the street, naked in the cold blast.

It proved hard. But the timid man never retraced his steps.

Thank God, he lived in a family circle which took no notice of his mental struggles. (It is a great privation to have no one by the fireside with whom to exchange thoughts; but it is restful too: what would become of anyone who at all hours, by his own hearth, had to meet the looks of an enemy of his thoughts?) Shortly before her death, his mother had married him to a healthy, right-minded woman, absolutely negligible, richly dowered as was proper, pretty enough, insipid and a good housewife, but with a mind uninquiring to an extent rare even among her own kind: she hardly ever opened a book; those she had been obliged to yawn over as a girl, in her pious establishment for young ladies, had bored her so that she thought one of the advantages of marriage was that it left her free to shut them. It did not bother her that her husband should pass his life among papers. Men have their own business, which did not interest her. She did not love him enough. . . . She did not detest him; it was not unpleasant to her—nor, good Lord! a great pleasure—to see him every day, at meals and in bed; she was fairly greedy, he was not greedy enough. In short, she loved him well enough, but (like the Normans) not well enough to be interested in what went on in the man's brain. It did not come within her household duties to tidy up that cupboard.

Thus, she would have known nothing of the crisis which, at forty, shook him out of the contented passivity which accepts the social and religious order of so-called "nice" people, if well-intentioned women friends, and

even her confessor, had not taught her the duty which is expected of a Christian wife, when her husband by his example causes a spiritual scandal in the community. There followed tearful expostulations from the wife to her husband. The effect was disastrous to their domestic peace and of no benefit to moral order: for naturally the well-meaning Constance understood nothing whatever about her husband's delinquency, and what she could say to him about it was not likely to amend it. He was very curt over anything that touched his freedom of thought. And on such a subject his wife's silliness was so flagrantly displayed that he had not the charity to hide it from her. She was conscious of it herself; but like all fools she only became the more pigheaded. Goodness knows how it would have ended for the pair, if her confessor, shrewder than herself, fearing the public scandal for which the clumsy champion of religion was heading, had not hastened to stop her mouth. From behind his grating, where the injured wife breathed forth her wordy mumblings and nose blowings, he now strove to calm the incoherences and fatal good intentions of his penitent, so imprudently wrenched from her blessed non-thinking. She must be brought back to it. It did not give him much trouble; she was quite ready to be convinced that God could not hold her responsible for her husband's sins, that trying to contradict the wanderer was to risk plunging him deeper in his perversity, that the best she could do was to offer her prayers to God for the unhappy man's salvation. The rest lay with God . . . (The rest was whether it pleased God that Julien should, or that he should not, be damned. . . . Constance sincerely hoped that he would not be. But, however, if he was . . . Well, she would rather not think about it! One has trouble enough over oneself! . . .)

So when Julien, not free from remorse, and touched by the resigned air which his wife now adopted, attempted to excuse himself by explaining his views in an elementary fashion, like a teacher addressing a child of seven, she made a frightened gesture:

"No, no! It is too tiring! . . ." And suppose she should happen to understand! . . . As if climbing a glacier one should be roped to a fool who is sliding down . . . No, thank you! She would rather not be roped thus . . . Poor Julien!

She said she was too stupid to understand (she was proud and happy to be so . . . "Blessed are the poor in spirit!") Poor Julien! . . . And to think that the poor fellow was sliding down alone made her do her best to be perfectly sweet to him, and to make his life peaceful and quiet, and provide good cooking . . .

"Let him, at least, have a little pleasure in this life, here below! . . ."

Julien had no delusions as to the real significance of his companion's kindness. But at least he had peace by his own hearth. It was not a very warm fire—still by turning up the collar of his cloak of thoughts, he could work, with no risk of being disturbed. He must not expect too much of life—since he had muffed it. For he had muffed it. He was sure of that. He felt it, as an obscure obsession. He did not analyze his feeling. What was the use, now? He had had his chance. And he had done worse than let it slip; he had rejected it. He had divorced himself from her who should have been the true companion of his life. He had withdrawn himself from her in vain. For sixteen years outside (inside) his visible life, his married and family life, he had had a hidden life dominated by the absent one. It was not so much Annette's face, her material image (it was that too, but this intellectual was

short-sighted in matters of the heart, and the image was blurred), it was not so much the vision of Annette, as the fiery furrow she had left in the core of his mind. Julien's inner being had been transformed by it. Ever since the far-off days of 1905, when he had ceased to see her, she had not ceased working in him; regret and remorse had secretly molded him in the spiritual image of what she would have wished him to be, or of what he imagined she would have wished.

Thus, he owed her the great effort of his life and the broadening of his enfranchised mind. That invisible fermentation changed water into wine and planted the audacious seeds of the whole world in that stay-at-home mind. They took a long time to sprout; he was conscious of those free inmates within him long before those around him—family, friends, colleagues—had any suspicion of them. He was in no hurry to display them. The books he wrote during that first period, nearly all devoted to science, gave proof of views which were original but strictly limited to professional matters. Prudence? Care for those around him, whom he knew he must wound? Little inclination for fighting? Remains of the congenital timidity which kept him silent upon his most secret self? Or was it not rather a more mysterious feeling, religious reserve upon what was deepest and most precious to himself and the imaginary witness of his inner life—his unreal Annette?

But as to the real Annette—most singularly!—he had never attempted to see her again. He had even been afraid to inquire after her. And this was nothing to be proud of! For fear of being troubled, he had avoided finding out if he might not have had occasions to help her in need, or danger. It was a case of the *"too soft-hearted"* who turn away from a crushed animal, because it is *"so painful"* or *"might be painful"* and make no attempt to dress the wound. . . . We know such sorry fellows! But

that he should be one of them and be aware of it, was enough to make him choke with disgust. . . . It took him some time to eliminate the old defects of his character. . . . And doubtless he never got completely rid of them. At the bottom of the vase there always remained a certain amount of rust at which his nails were ever scratching.

But all have their rust, and Annette had hers. The essential thing, in the soul, is that the running water should prevent life's conduits from getting blocked up. Fresh water, new water . . . The only irremediable corruption to the soul is that of the pond. The stream washes out its vase. She passed, the Rivière! She had torn him from his torpid immobility, from resignation to that purgatory of the spirit in which thousands of human infusoria vegetate. She had given him the impulse and revealed life to him, by her passion, her suffering, and her flame in the darkness.

And moreover (sad to say, but true!) by the very suffering which he had caused Annette, he had actually redeemed himself! To make one we love suffer unjustly, when we have the energy to realize it fully, may become an enriching revelation. To it Julien had ever since owed, through remorse, a deeper insight into men, an instinct for justice, a need to make reparation, by doing good to others, for the harm he had done to one. Annette had paid for him.

Julien belonged to the old French bourgeoisie which has many encrusted vices, and fingers that clutch money saved; but these bourgeois make a religion of money owed, and are feverishly anxious not to die before it is paid back. When they walk in the fields, the birds do not sing to them of love and springtime! But they hear the quail crying: *"Pay your debts!"*

Julien paid his.

XXVII

Who would have believed it? Did he ever really know it himself? It was to pay those debts that he found himself during the war thrown, much against his will, into that social conflict for which he had a physical and moral aversion.

In the preceding period, while his spirit, without showing its nature, was given over to contemplation, concentrating its strength, and gathering energy to achieve its independence, the invisible Annette had been ever by his side. She had no need to speak. She marched on. He never asked himself where the road would lead him. There was but one road; the road along which the fine hips beside him were advancing.

In his works, he had gradually inclined towards the history and philosophy of science. And by the double effect of action and complementary reaction, his mind, while it freed itself from the network of Catholic creepers that hampered his limbs, was entering a forest of thought which stretched far beyond the limits not only of religion, but of the science and reason of an epoch. It was an expedition as adventurous as Vasco's, and like his it doubled the Cape of Storms. Having once put out, there was no further port of call; one was at the mercy of the winds and sea currents; one had said farewell to land; one's country was on or under the ocean.

A Latin Catholic, who has believed what he believes no longer, never casts anchor in the Waters of Doubt, he never stops, like those who "*protest,*" or who did "*protest*"—a very long time ago!—among the Germans and Saxons. He goes to the bottom, and there is no bottom.

He does not build for himself below water, like the "Reformers" (the well-named, who reject only by halves!) or like the metaphysicians of pure and practical Nordic Reason, a wooden platform suspended over the abyss. He is alone and naked, and he swims. He has only his limbs to uphold him. He knows the hour will come when he must sink. But he will not beg for succor.

Julien had flung himself into harsh disillusioned reason, which accepts no compromise. Like many who have bowed down too low to faith and to the collection of restraints imposed by society, he cherished a resentment towards both that went beyond the limits of strict justice. He was not incapable of realizing this, but he was incapable of renouncing the revenge. He styled himself, bitterly, "*Julien the Apostate.*" And in that longing for reprisals which soon became apparent in his writings, there was chastisement of himself—of the man he had been.

It was first perceived between the lines of his "Philosophical Essays"; religion felt itself attacked. It said so too loudly, it showed the blows had struck home; he redoubled them. And though, after a few bitter engagements, it was found prudent to retire, and keep silence (with marvelous unanimity, the whole right-minded press never breathed another word about Julien's publications), the rupture was definitive; and greetings exchanged with old acquaintances carried no illusion: "*general mobilization is not war,*" as the augurs say; but they do not look at each other and laugh: war is coming, war is there, it awaits the hour.

Then came the other war—the real war of 1914. In it all the accumulated pre-war passions found a broth-culture in which to proliferate. Hatred of the outside enemy was not the only enmity craving satisfaction. And

how much more clearly had he been judged by those who were suspicious and envious, by those who concealed hatred for him, than by his friends (it is usually so)! Even Julien himself had perhaps not judged so clearly. For he had not yet realized the spirit of revolution that lay within him. In the monotonous rumbling of motor buses that go snorting between the two rows of gray façades, which border the street of every day, solitary revolt grows drowsy, like a painful throbbing of the gums. There is nothing to bite. Delusive calm! Julien knew that his disillusioned criticism had pierced beyond the first crust of his defunct faith to the rotten shell of society; it lay with him to dig the point in deeper, and lay bare the purulent abscess. He did not do so. He put off the moment of proving that the whole social order and its moral pillars were condemned. He would have been forced to seek another dwelling; and forty years of home life had always made him think with terror of moving. Yet he knew that notice had been given to leave the old lodging. But he waited, with fatalism, for the end of the term, when he would have to move out . . . And in that caravansary of the past, there was still a great bazaar the key of which he could not make up his mind to return. He even avoided going to look at it; he had closed the doors and shutters upon the dust of centuries; it was not prudent to let in the daylight, and to sweep. That great bazaar was *la Patrie*. To the French before 1914, it was the only undisputed God. All the other gods were subject to the common law of life: death, in whole or in part, old age, illness, the worm that gnaws the altars. No god was left untouched save *la Patrie*. For believers in religions, as for "free-thinkers." And still more so for the latter. For otherwise, these poor people had nowhere to turn. That pathetic and pitiful

(in both senses of the word: pity) cry of anguish, of the grand-master of the lay University, old Lavisse:

"But if you take away my Country, what shall I have left? What reason will I have for my existence?"

Those old men, shut in until the last day by the harmonious but so narrow horizon of their hills! They must have this land with all its dead, fifteen centuries of dead, under their heels! Shake their "country" and it was as if the earth began to quake; all those who have been in an earthquake know the inexpressible, unique agony which seizes upon all the living: the stable point, the only one upon which man has built, is withdrawn, there is nothing left. . . . Julien, being an ultra-sensitive seismograph, was feeling beforehand the warning rumbles under the earth, and the obscure distress of the soul which is about to lose its support. So much the more did he turn away his eyes. He stood there, speechless, inhibited; and he took care not to touch the last remaining idol. But some of those he had deserted, priests well used to reading consciences, his old spiritual director, a shrewd old man, with a large thin-lipped mouth, like Voltaire's (but the eyes had no room for irony, they got into the house by ruse or burglary), had very soon seen, from the beginning of his revolt, that the rebel would not have the prudence to distinguish between *fas* and *nefas*, and that he would attack the great Fetish; and with their arms crossed in their long sleeves, they waited patiently, on the watch for the catastrophe. Less knowing were those laymen who took Julien for a dependable free-thinker who had betrayed the sacristy only for the benefit of the lodge, and had enlisted himself in the service of reason, traditionalist, nationalist, bourgeois, lay and obligatory: and they had opened the doors of the Collège de France to him, together with those of the Academy of

Moral and Political Sciences, while he was awaiting the other, the only one that counts, the Immortal. (For some of the great electors within had fixed their choice upon him, and his old master, whose touching and puerile exclamation we have just quoted, had told him that in two or three years his election was assured; he was making it his personal concern.) For some unknown reason, the old man had a tender affection for Julien; he had seen him as a child in his class; then on the benches of the Faculty; and without troubling to penetrate his thoughts, he had grown attached to the face whose youthful gravity and loyalty made an agreeable resting place for his eyes while he was lecturing; between the two pairs of eyes, smiling at each other, there had arisen, in the course of years, a silent relationship, as of father and son. The old man was convinced that he had found a spiritual heir in Julien. And Julien, grateful and respectful, had never asked himself clearly whether he answered to his master's expectation.

When the war came, and the intellectuals (led by the members of the University) enrolled of their own accord in the service of their country, the Maréchal of the University, automatically appointed to power in spite of his age, naturally entrusted his favorite with a leading part on the staff of the new Arm he was organizing: Intelligence, militarized for the first time, and requisitioned for service in the factories of intellectual munitions and cannon. History, science, eloquence, everything was useful. He would have been better advised to leave Julien in the shade. Then Julien would not have attempted to come forward, and he would probably have avoided discussing the conclusions which his elders, his peers, and colleagues would have made him read and subscribe to. But to ask him to control them, to share in the secrets of their fabrication! What imprudence! . . . They were in good faith—in their fashion. These worthy men were so full of national passions, and the conviction that these were identified with the truth, that when truth seemed to contradict them they did not hesitate to silence it, or to make it say what they wanted. It only meant stretching a little the limbs that were firmly tied to the rack. (It is not for nothing that the Sorbonne counts among its ancestors men of art and science who put to the "question" the bodies of those from whom they wished to extort the truth!) Julien was no good at the trade. He listened to the voice of truth: and he did not know what "to question" meant. He naïvely reported from his study of German documents exactly what the text contained. Discussion arose; and as it brought about comparison with the very different results of his colleagues, their opposition was revealed. It was clear, sudden, and brutal. When an intellectual is irritated by being imprudently touched in a sensitive spot, he does not see red but white. (In fire, one knows, it is a more intense degree.) Julien went white to the lips as he listened to the transcriptions of one of his colleagues; he brought the flat of his hand down on the table, and cried:

"But, it's a lie!"

What a hue and cry! . . . The man he had insulted had hitherto been a loved and esteemed friend, a great professor, equally respected for his science and the integrity of his character. Julien apologized on the spot, and tried confusedly to explain his judgment and make it more acceptable. But the mark of the blow remained on the face that had received it, and the eyes now burned with inexpiable hatred. Never has an intellectual forgiven a colleague for seeing in him what he refuses to see in himself; for now, whatever he may do, he knows

that what he refuses to see is *there*. Julien, more full of consternation than the man whom he had just fatally wounded, kept repeating to himself on the way home:

"And he is honest!"

Julien knew he was, he would have gone to the stake on it. . . . That great savant. . . . A life of disinterestedness. . . . And the cult of truth. . . . He laughed bitterly:

"The *truth* of *honest men!*"

It was a shock to him. He felt the effects of his puritan education. The most puritan are often those who break with religion. When they think they do so for love of liberty, it is love of purity that urges them, the passion for pure truth, without compromise. He had thought to find it outside religion, among the followers of free reason. It was not there either. . . . And Julien, pushing aside with feverish hands his respect which had hitherto protected the "honest men" around him, began to examine things thoroughly. During those days he buried many of his fellows. But he had not the courage to deliver their funeral orations. He had so greatly honored them that their failure was his own.

Most painful of all was the rupture with his old master; for it took place quietly, like the death of a father in his bed, when the dying man looks silently upon his son with poignant reproach. The old man, showing no anger, refused to read the memoir Julien had brought him. For Julien, put upon the track against his will, could no longer prevent himself from seeking the truth; he brought it back to his master. The old man said:

"No, I will not, it's useless. . . ."

And laying his large hand swollen by age on Julien's:

"My friend, you grieve me. . . . Reflect! . . . You

are ruining yourself. . . . You are failing in all that we expect of you . . . in our common duty. . . ."

Julien stiffened:

"The common duty, common to us, men of science, is to serve truth, at any price. You taught me that yourself."

The old man shook his heavy head, and a flame shone in his bloodshot eyes:

"Truth can never be separated from our country. The cause of both is one."

"So be it! Then let our country not go astray from truth!"

"The country first!" said the old man. "We are all at her service."

"All, but not . . ." The old man cut him short.

"Everything. All that we have. Without exception."

Both kept silence. The old man's flame had died down. He avoided looking at Julien. He was waiting for Julien to speak, for Julien to say the words he expected. As the silence was prolonged, he raised his great head, like a sick lion's, and the heavy eyelids which seemed a reminder of the coffin-lid; and his thick, moist glance sought Julien's with tenderness, fear, and entreaty. Julien was overwhelmed, but he could say nothing else than:

"I cannot give what does not belong to me, that to which I belong—truth."

He did not say it; why inflict one more useless wound? But he did inflict it. The old man read the words he did not utter. The heavy eyelids fell, and the great head sunk on his breast. After recovering his breath for a moment, the stricken patriarch rose painfully from his chair, propping himself with his fists on the table. Julien sprang forward to help him; but with the awkward gesture of a man suffering from ankylosis, the master waved him

off, without looking at him. And he went away, without looking back, making the floor creak with his heavy footsteps, head bowed, and back bent. He had received a death blow.

XXVIII

To a man like Julien, the wound one has inflicted on another is not the least painful; one cannot cure it as one's own; we grow new skin, it heals up; but we cannot grow new skin for others and their wounds pain us. . . . But for a man like Julien that obsession cannot stop the implacable forward march of the mind. It moves on, over its wounded and its dead. Julien could no longer say to his mind:

"Halt! . . . And forget what you have seen."

He never forgot anything. It was an infirmity of his mind. He went on. He did not seek polemics, and his method was unobtrusive. He wished only to enlighten himself—he was in no hurry to enlighten others: for he knew enough about them now to know that they did not want to be enlightened. But the mere thought of his presence beside them, his silent control contradicting them, the wordless judgment he was passing on them (for they could no longer ignore it), threw them into a state of irritation, which his very reserve exasperated. A blind instinct urged them to force him out of it. The most provocative was the friend—the dead friend—the mortal enemy, whose cheek retained eternally the sting of his blow. Julien was not allowed to be silent. It is too easy not to speak, and be free to think! His colleagues confronted him with a common declaration. He did not sign it. They insisted that he should say why. Julien had a horror of any public profession of faith. But he did not shirk his responsibility. He said why. He said it in terms so clear and precise that when it was said, those who had imprudently forced it from him would have

liked to ram it down his throat again. They had overreached themselves in their stupid passion. They had set a trap for the enemy and found themselves caught in it. It might still have done no harm if they had but kept their fury behind closed doors. But the journalists got wind of it, and one of them managed to get a copy of the heretic's dangerous confession. The stupidity of the censorship did the rest: it allowed access to the powder magazine, in order to exalt the patriotic stigma which the high teaching body had inflicted upon the unworthiness of one of their members. The clumsy excision of several passages, neither more nor less audacious than the rest, stimulated the public imagination to seek worse audacities. Julien himself was surprised when he read his own article. His natural timidity made him ask himself:

"But who? But who said that? Who made me say it?"

Then suddenly, he was silent—Annette was reading over his shoulder. . . . Julien got up, he walked up and down his room two or three times. He sat down again. And he smiled:

"What woman wills . . . Come what may."

"She" had achieved her end. He had broken the leading-strings of the old social order—even as "she" had broken them. And now, he was alone—alone with "her"; but he was not so sentimental as not to know that "she" was but a shadow of his brain; and he felt the need of flesh, the living body united to his, to struggle against this world of flesh. But he never even thought of seeking her. Too late! The game was lost. He was one of those stoics (I salute them, God bless them! but I do not envy them their broth; let them lick their lips over it!) who are never afraid of defeat, but accept it, and do

nothing to remedy it. Julien remained, proudly, in the desert of his home—which luckily was beginning to be enlivened by a child's turbulence. . . . We shall meet her again. But she is still taken up—I will not say with her dolls, for she has no girlish tastes—but with her boy's games and playthings. Of course, being a "pacifist's" daughter, she thought of nothing but wounds and bumps; she is Georgette: she will be George. For the moment she made her presence known only by her din about the house. Not a week without some smash-up! Her mother bewailed herself like Rachel. Her father said nothing. He never scolded.

All outside his home had become a hostile void. Julien's academic career was cut short. The grand-electors of the Academy would be careful henceforward to admit accomplices only—ministers, marshals, or intellectuals who, like themselves, had betrayed truth for the good cause. . . . "For God, the Tsar, and Country! . . ." the device of Michael Strogoff. . . . Julien's old master and patron did not answer his affectionate letters, and returned unread a pamphlet in which Julien, with moderation and respect for those who thought differently, objectively maintained (with documentary evidence) his thesis of shared responsibility for the war and the duty of intellectuals to work for speedy reconciliation. The sheltered combatants of *L'Action Française*, who, at little risk, had constituted themselves the "defenders" of the morale of the stay-at-homes, organized several disturbances during his lectures at the College de France. Luckily professional solidarity, even stronger than patriotic passion, defended him against the violators of this enclosure, sacred like those medieval sanctuaries in which criminals could not be arrested. He kept his class. It

was only closed for a few weeks. By that time he was forgotten. The Whipping Fathers of the *Action Française* had found other victims.

Julien caused no further scandal. But the merit was not his. The censorship, now on the alert, would not pass a single line of his. Even archæological monographs were suspect. Nothing further could appear before the end of the war. Julien still retained too much of his two-fold pride as an intellectual and a bourgeois to listen to the offers made him by political parties of the opposition, eager to secure his name for their associations and their infrequent and troubled meetings. It would take him many years to get rid of his starched shirt. Even when freed and unstiffened, he would always be more at his ease among his books than with the man in the street. But his mind was intrepid, nothing would ever make him turn from the path on which he had entered, and his body, without joy, but without complaint, would loyally follow the mind that led it—if necessary, even to the barricades.

He had not reached that point between 1915 and 1919. He meditated in silence. The very void which had been made around him gave him leisure. His intellectual solitude enriched and emboldened him. He learned to do without other people. And those others who, in trying to deprive him of air, taught him to seek it on the summits, were irritated at their failure, and their enmity grew more venomous. They had hushed up the scandal in vain. The scandal was silent, but it lived.

Julien's stern and ardent meditation was fixed on men as well as on ideas. The life experiences which had wounded him were a benefit to his mind. They threw light on human nature for him and lit up the windings of the labyrinth. He had got beyond book learning. From day to day, for years, he penetrated the catacombs

of the soul, all the intercrossing byways of the subconscious which lie under the hollow ground, beneath the feet of the spoken thought, the daily lie. He explored them alone, without seeking much help from the candle of the great doctors of psycho-analysis. He had his own lantern. His religious atavism had put into his hand the key of a singular intuition, as much allied to animal instinct as to reasoned intelligence, but ordered and directed by the latter. The result was a system of thought which after long wandering underground, seeking an issue, pierced the crust of darkness at the weakest points marked by the engineer, and rose in artesian fountains of images. It became evident that the great waters of the depths, full of symbols, unaware of each other like blind fish, belonged to a poet-philosopher. But it was to take Julien a long time to find it out. As he had little feeling for what is generally admired under the name of poetry, he thought himself shut out from that light, for which he felt no regret; and as to philosophy, since religious doubt had ruined his foundations, he imagined that there were no foundations, and he jeered at the vain efforts of the mind to rebuild them. He believed, in all good faith, that he believed in nothing. . . . Possibly! . . . He believed no more. But he was creating. . . . And what is creating, if not believing? . . . Not with the head, perhaps, but with the loins. The voice of being cries: "Beget!" The head will be obliged to follow. It is a poor lord compared to the profound forces of the flesh. When I say: "the flesh," I mean "the soul," and its armies. Julien had more of those energies in him than he knew. We all have. But they sleep; we are afraid to rouse them. And the majority of those who are afraid are right. They would be incapable of directing them.

Let the country look out if those bands should be let loose! But Julien governed his armies, while he followed them. An intellectual of his stamp may launch his boat into the currents: he keeps his hold on the tiller.

This rare equilibrium of the critical mind and the intuition gave birth to "*Dialogues of the People on the Aventine*" in which the people of the Soul, who had broken their bonds with the City, held tumultuous deliberations; and this time the man who pleaded the cause of the Stomach did not get the last word: he who would eat, let him work! . . . "Show your hands! Intellectuals, savants, artists, writers, give an account of yourselves! What have you done in the hundred years that you have been kings—or lackeys—of opinion?" It was a parade à la Daumier. All the heroes of the inkpot on the stage! But the real drama was in the soul of the spectator, who turned away in scorn—in the soul of the people, camped without the city, round their great watch-fires in the night, watching the red smoke rise to the vault of heaven, where the crackling stars are but sparks. The mind, without a guide, was making its Revolution, in the hour when the Revolution was being made by the fists of nations in the heart of Europe. But the mind was unaware of events, and did nothing to make itself known. Julien did not publish his meditations. Even later when, the state of war and the censorship having come to an end, he could easily have found a publisher, he kept them in manuscript; it was repugnant to him to bring them into the open. Perhaps because then he would have been obliged to see himself there too, in broad daylight. And from the moment when light from without had entered his house, he would no longer be able to shut his door. An end to shadow! . . . Shadow was done with. But there lingered complaisantly the twilight dear to men of

thought. An end to the Rembrandtesque penumbra, where from the invisible sun, shunned by too sensitive eyes, soft orange reflections light up the background of the room. . . . The sun is coming in. Action is there.

Julien put off the moment of opening the door to the visitor, as long as possible.

So in the period following the war, he contented himself with publishing his great works on the history of science. He thought them objective. But his robust personality, fed by virile solitude, whose bow had been strung by years of compression, did not perceive the brazen arrows which he aimed in every chapter against the falsehoods of the mind of his time, and of all times. As he had been imbued with them himself, he was aiming at himself. Who then was aiming? Himself. The new Julien, the new man, bleeding from his effort to set himself free. And it was a whole intellectual epoch, a whole age of society, now drawing to its end, which received the dart, and showed it.

It showed it as little as possible, so as not to call public attention to the archer. And youth, having no time to look for thought in the depths of bulky volumes, built like cathedrals, with the buttresses showing (I mean the support of their monumental documentation), passed by without looking. Besides, if they had attempted to look, would they have understood? Would they have accepted? In the first post-war years, the world resentfully discredited the great generation of heroes of the mind who, like Spitteler and Thomas Hardy, had reconciled themselves to proud solitude and heroic pessimism and with valiant eyes stared tragic reality in the face with no hope of transforming it. Switzerland, so poor in genius, was persistent in almost malignant sarcasm against the poet of *Olympian Spring*. Stockholm, so lavish with the

Nobel prize, never deigned to bestow it on Thomas Hardy. There was a grudge against these men for their virile detachment, which "dwelt serene" in implacable truth. They were accused of a selfishness which contented itself with a bad world, devoid of hope, and which, having succeeded in establishing their own life and glory there, sought no remedy. It was not realized that these grand old men had been haunted, nearly all their lives, by a sense of wounded justice, that they had had to harden themselves against sorrow, and that if they had shut themselves up, like Spitteler, in an armor of indifference and lordly irony, it was after the fashion of Timon of Athens, betrayed in his love for humanity. . . . "Durchaus!" . . . "In spite of all!" . . . The word of Prometheus and Heracles, who have no faith in the men for whom they are about to sacrifice themselves! . . .

Julien had been nourished by this bitter substance, by the Nietzschean pessimism of old lions who laugh. But he belonged to an intermediate generation, between these great solitaries of thought who do not act, and post-war youth who would act before thinking—to fill up the gulf. (They were not of a stature to fill it up! Their bodies and souls were to be broken in it. . . .)

Julien, like them, had the abysmal vision of Existence, the human gulf. But that vision did not strike him in growing youth, when the tender body and mind are still unformed. His bones were hardened now, he was not broken. He did not flinch. He was able to look the Nothingness of the dark adventure in the eyes. And he illuminated that darkness with the lightning of the mind that creates *its* truth, *its* beauty, and *its* goodness. He felt the powerful effects of these, and wrapped himself in them, with love, without losing for a moment the

clear consciousness of the abyss over which he was suspended with all that he loved.

That he loved? What did he love? He was alone, and disillusioned about men, who kept him and whom he kept at a distance. . . . Yes, the present—that which is dying, and will be dead to-morrow! It was not for these condemned, these men of the present, that he thought, lived, and created. But he who creates by flesh or by mind (it is all the same!) bears the men of the future in his loins. How should he not love them? He projects them into the darkness. It is they who will fill up the abyss.

This great solitary who so intrepidly engendered his thought was making the future, without dreaming of it; without knowing it, he was a worker in the work-yard of the men and nations of the world who at that moment were laboring to build a new order, a new world. And later, when he became aware of it—after outside events had forced an entrance into his study—he found himself enlisted in the army of the Revolution. For ten years already this "Revolutionist without knowing it" had been firing his brazen arrows for it against the mind of the enemy.

And when he was but half aware of it, Annette, convalescent, reading his books in bed, discovered it at the first glance. And joy inundated the heart in her bosom; the old love, still young, swelled her breasts. She also had engendered . . . him, who loved her. Her Julien. . . . The Archer.

XXIX

So now the two old friends were very near each other. Possibly their return to each other would never have come about, but for two young hands that pushed them by the shoulders: "Forward! forward!" solid hands, strong and athletic.

The good genius, the young sprite who brought together the two old lovers, separated by the briers of twenty years, in the magic forest of an autumn's night dream, resembled Puck only in gayety. She was agile, certainly, and her supple body could bend backwards till she touched her heels with her hands, standing. But she did not pass unperceived, and if the earth could speak, it would have cried out under her feet. What they held beneath their soles, they held; every step said: "Mine! . . . The earth is mine! Life is mine! . . ." And that "me" was a tall robust girl, like a boy, with a round close-cropped head, flat bust, broad shoulders, slight hips, muscular arms, long thighs, white calves, and arched feet. She was Julien's daughter, Georgette by name. But she was George: a boy. And quite ready to step upon the dragon. She would have laughed heartily to see the great lizard wriggling under her heel. . . . She had known how to laugh ever since she came into the world. God knows where she had learned it! Her gloomy household, father and mother and grandmother, had been dumbfounded when it first echoed with the sound; and even now, though he had been blessed with her for twenty years, Julien felt the same wonder at it, every minute, ashamed of himself and anxious.

"If the miracle should cease!"

For miracle it was. He had so little turn for laughter. He laughed so badly! And he felt as he heard it that it was so beautiful, so good! Who had given him such a gift? He told himself that he did not deserve it. And indeed he did not, tormenting himself thus with this idea of merit and demerit! As if the thrush thought of that! It finds that grapes are good. George found life good. "Pilfer! . . ." She pilfered. . . . Who would have told Julien's generation that, on the field of ruin where moaning they gathered up the fragments of their broken bowl, the new brood would be able to find a vineyard? None of the elders had shown her the way. She walked alone. One had only to look at her walking, with her bust slightly inclined like a runner, her elbows to her sides, hands forward, ready to seize, mouth half open, and bosom rising and falling with her rhythmic breath, very light eyes in a fair sunburnt face—nothing escaped her on the way; and within nothing troubled her. Well endowed in body and mind, she had developed vigorously, leisurely, without scruples, and without excess. Happily for her she was, in an amazing degree, unaffected by the atmosphere of the house. Her faculty of not hearing lamentations and remonstrances had been the despair of her mother; it was not bad will, it was much worse: indifference pure and simple. She did not hear what bored her. This physical insensibility did not exclude an expansive heart. When her mother, having talked and talked, asked her: "Do you understand? What did I say?" George laughed in her face, and embraced her so impetuously that the good woman had no further courage to scold; but she had no doubt that she had wasted her time once more. If, at least, she could have understood what was going on inside the girl! But it was all a secret chamber to her; she could not cross the threshold.

She did not know what George thought about the thing that was nearest her heart: religion. George made no objection to going to Mass with her mother, saying her prayers, and even, if it was insisted on, going periodically to wash her linen in the confessional: she went, and returned, with the same careless good humor as from her college, or tennis; her sins did not weigh heavily upon her! . . . But what did she think! What did she think of what she read in her missal, of the Gospel, of Jesus Christ and the Virgin, of the Church, and of God; and even of the after-death and the resurrection? It was impossible to find out! The truth is that she thought nothing about them. They did not interest her. . . .

"Oh! Good Lord, yes, I've thought of course, like everyone else, that we must die. But it is a long way off! And we only die once. Whereas we live a hundred thousand times, at every minute of the day. There is no time to bother about the end. What is the use? What do we know about it? . . . Yes, of course, there is the Church that tells you this. And there are others who tell you that. As for me, let it be this and that. It is not my business to discuss what I know nothing about. I have too many other interesting things to do. Think for me about those things, if you like! And above all don't worry yourself about me! I shall always be able to find a way out! . . ."

She did not say this. Perhaps she did not express it clearly to herself. But it could be read in her magnificent unconcern. And the mother did not lack reasons for fresh torments. She reveled in them. (All hungers must have bread. Some prefer the bread of tears. George did not grudge it them. . . .)

Perhaps it was lucky for both that the mother departed to what she thought the better world before her

daughter had turned fifteen. Of course George said and thought:

"My poor mother!"

And she wept floods: she could, just like anyone else! On that occasion she indulged in one of those great childish attacks of grief, when the nose gets swollen, and the eyes are blind from weeping. But—it was not her fault—when the shower was over, and the eyes dried, it was finer than before; and "poor mother" did not take up much room in the house. Neither father nor daughter admitted it; but they were much more at their ease.

However far Julien might be from knowing his daughter's mind—undiscovered country!—he felt an incomprehensible indulgence for her, especially since the child, left solely to his protection, had grown into a woman. He had not checked her development in any way, he allowed her a freedom which would have driven her mother mad: George came in and went out as she liked, planned her days as she pleased, told him about them, or not, as she chose—she could make what she would of her life. Julien asked nothing of her but to see that the house was well kept, and to be punctual at meals, and for the rest to know that he trusted her. She knew it, and to her it was the most effective discipline. At moments when the brain reels (there are always such moments in a girl's life), George held on to herself, thinking:

"There are two of us: he and I."

Since he trusted her! If he had put a veto on anything she would probably have stepped over it, for fun. And yet the system of paternal non-resistance alone could not have sufficed to save her! She might just as well have said:

"What if I did taste it? It would do him no harm, and it would do me good . . ."

But she did not want to taste it. Love was the least of her cares. Yet she was a fine girl, quite complete. Nothing was wanting in her. What then? She did not desire men. And the desire for men seemed to her rather grotesque. She did not fail through ignorance. She had read—and how much—in Nature's great book. She was studying Physics, Chemistry and Biology. And God knows what she had seen and heard! But it was like water on a duck's back. The most risky sights and conversations went "splash" in her stream and disappeared, leaving no trace. Her hearty big-boy laugh spoilt the nerve of the most daring; they were disarmed and laughed with her. They treated her as a comrade and contented themselves with chaffing the "invulnerable." She was the first to jeer at herself. But she did not try to change.

The passion for sport had taken the place of other passions. She put the best of herself into it. All joys in one: joy of the game, joy of action, joy of self-mastery, joy of pride and joy of disinterested passion, intoxication of the blood and clearness of mind, plenitude of energies and the paroxysm when life only hangs by a thread—"And the thread is good, life bounds, air and earth are mine . . ."

Without telling her father (he heard of it only after it was known to all Paris) she went into regular training; she said to herself:

"I will do as well as the rest, I will do better."

For on seeing them going round the track, her young blood ran swifter, she pawed the ground; she was sure of her lungs and her thighs. And she ran in the stadium and broke the record for three hundred meters; she held it sturdily for several months. She had had her hour of

Olympian glory among the anachronistic youth who, without thinking of it, revived ancient Greece, under the tip of the black wing of chaos that was spreading over the sky of Europe. She was worth seeing in the moment of victory, dead beat, panting, shiny, smelling of sweat, hair plastered down, round black encircled eyes, drawn features, rather haggard, frankly ugly, indifferent to beauty—and more beautiful than beauty; she was radiant:

"I have *had* it! . . ."

What? That record? . . . Ah! much more than a stadium success.

"I have *had* my fill! I have *had* myself! . . ." What possession can equal that? What does one want with that of lovers. Here is pure complete joy! Not a grain could be added to it. . . . Yes, it does not last. . . . Nothing lasts. But one has had it. The glow of it remains under one's skin. What on earth could possibly be more solid?

There were days when a secret voice whispered to her, as she met little feet toddling in a garden, and a little nose in the air, that was not always wiped:

"There is the child . . ."

The Amazon had not cut off her breasts. The woman's heart remembered. . . . She smiled at the toddler. . . .

"Yes, that would be good too—if it were not for the man."

But there was the man. . . . "The devil!" . . . She put the child out of her thoughts. One can't have everything! What she had was enough for her.

XXX

And Julien, who from out the dim light, like that of a morose old Faust in his alchemist's study, contemplated her unawares and admired in bewilderment the free girl he had begotten, trembled every day lest she should leave him, and reassured himself every day, seeing her content, and without anxiety or desires. He said to himself:

"How does she do it? How did she manage to be my issue? . . ."

And an inner voice replied:

"You know quite well! You recognize *her* . . ."

Who was she?—She who had set a seal upon his life, she whom his life had rejected. But, God be praised! she had been the stronger. She had never left his house. She had gradually penetrated his mind. She had done more. She had penetrated into his granary. Julien tried to persuade himself that this living seed which had sprung from him came from her. He pretended to recognize her. He recognized certain details imperceptible to other eyes, a downy shadow at the corner of the lips, the carriage of the neck, the pronunciation of certain consonants, remarks she had made, and God knows what else! . . . He said to himself:

"Good God! Annette. . . ."

Illusion, no doubt. His vision, impregnated with her, projected her onto things. But after all, if his mind was impregnated by her, why should his daughter not be so likewise? What did it matter if he were the sport of an obsession! But it mattered a good deal to George's happiness. Though she had not the least suspicion of it, she

owed her father's amazing indulgence and his tender respect for her liberty to it. She said to herself—"I am lucky! . . ." She did not know whom she had to thank for it.

In the end she met it one day, the invisible ghost that stole about the house! She had surely brushed against it often, on the threshold of her father's room, or met it in his eyes, from the days of her early childhood. But she was so used to it that she had never noticed it. The ghost had to speak. . . . It did speak.

Julien had gone to London for a Congress. He was to stay a fortnight. George took advantage of his absence to have a dust hunt in the holy of holies: his work room. Like all real workers, he never allowed anyone to touch it: he claimed to keep it in order himself. And, of course, to other eyes than his own, his order was the most inextricable disorder. George, who was the born enemy of confusion, had been on the watch for a long time for the chance to work her will. She seized the moment when the master was away. Wouldn't he make a song and dance when he got back! . . . Well, let him. . . .

"Sing away, dad! . . ."

She laughed, in anticipation, like a naughty girl:

"Protest, sacred papers!" (She gathered them in armfuls and flung them on the floor.) "I am the master here. . . ."

She went at it with a will, sweeping away bundles, juggling with cardboard boxes, so that one of them opening its jaws to protest, vomited forth, as in the fairy tale, the flood of words piled up within. Letters and letters, which had been clumsily tied up, were scattered all over the room. What were they? . . . George crouched on the floor to pick them up, laughing more than ever:

"Good Lord! . . . What if he sees that I have touched them! . . . What shall I do now to put them back the same way he had them? The only way is to read them to see the dates. Just the heading. It won't take long. Father's correspondence must be deadly boring! . . . But what's this?"

The first lines of the first letter promised anything but boredom. And the string, with the clumsy still-tied knot which had let the papers escape—it was, it had once been, a ribbon. . . .

"Oh, really, dad! . . ."

She did not ask herself whether she was going to read them, as one decently should when one has a shred of old-time shame left. Why certainly, she was going to read them! This promised to be very interesting. She settled herself comfortably on the floor with legs crossed, almost under the table, among the scattered letters. And she dipped haphazard into the heap. No fear of being disturbed. She was alone in the flat. . . . "If anyone rings, I'll let them ring. . . ." The open window. Blackbirds in the garden outside. The June sunshine flowed round her, caressing the old brass of the bureau above her head. But she was in a shady arbor, and a soul coming up out of the letters twined round her fingers like a vine, while her nostrils were filled with the scent of the flowering jasmine in the garden. She was humming. She was happy. . . .

Did she not realize her misdemeanor? . . . Oh! perfectly! She realized it, and it amused her. She was past respecting conventional morality. She knew that it must not be openly defied; it was determined and resourceful. But, on the sly? . . . Well, that's different! She was like Kitchener. Once east of Suez, a different morality! . . . "I have my own. . . ." And (it was certainly lucky) hers was good and wholesome, perhaps better than

that which was left in the anchorage, on the other side of the canal. She sincerely loved her father. Perhaps not, surely not! as girls used to love their fathers. The dose of respect has mightily decreased. There is no trace of fear. And the veneer of that ancient veneration is decidedly chipped. But has affection lost by it? I should say on the contrary. . . . Provided, of course, that he, the man, has deserved it.

"For why should I be bound to love him, if he had done nothing more than beget me? Between ourselves, dad, for all the trouble that gave you! . . . To bring me up, yes. . . . That's a different matter. . . . Well, now it is for me to judge. So much the worse for you, if you did not want, or did not know, what was my welfare, and my right! . . . You did want and you did know, my old man; and your merit is the greater that your daughter was not an easy goat to keep. I have trampled over all your flower-beds of prejudices! I do not forget it. I forget nothing. And if anyone ever dared to touch you, he would have me to reckon with. We are allies. But between ourselves, old pal, I have a perfect right to laugh at you, and to poke my nose into your papers. . . . Yes, you would not admit it, you belong to the good old days. But I belong to mine. Enough! I'll read. You will know nothing about it. One mustn't hurt children's feelings." . . .

She lit a cigarette.

"Ah! Take care! I mustn't set fire to the whole show. . . ."

To read better she sucked silently for a moment the juice of the letter, and the end of her cigarette. . . .

"No! What passion! . . . Is it possible that my old father was ever loved like that! . . ."

The cigarette burned, burned, and went out. George

forgot she was holding it, till it burnt the tips of her fingers. She did not think of lighting others. She stretched herself out full length on her stomach, with her elbows on the floor, to read better. She read, and read. . . . What a torrent! It seemed to her that she was bathing her stomach in it. She read without judging, without trying to form an opinion, without understanding very well. It was such a different world to her! . . . But to her what emerged from every line, from every ripple of the current, was a woman, a woman loving, sorrowful, but virile in her lament and ardor, dominating the other—"that man"—from the height of her proud soul, leading him by the hand, comforting him with her tender strength, sacrificing herself, and in the end consoling him for sacrificing her. . . . And he, the man, cut a melancholy and sorry figure beside her, as one who had seen happiness pass by, and had not had the strength to seize it, and who was so conscious of having ruined himself by refusing it that he had written in his heavy hand, outside the packet of letters:

"My murdered happiness."

George read this cry as she was trying to gather up the scattered letters.

She stopped collecting them. She lay down on her back with hands clasped behind her head. She was looking at a red rose hanging to the side of the window, stirred by a stormy wind. And all round her, on the floor, that silent symphony of love. . . .

Thirty years before, another woman, another girl, had thus rifled her father's love secrets.[1] Now avenging fate delivered her up in her turn. But her father was then dead. George's father was alive. And the stirred-up

[1] "Annette and Sylvie."

embers were still burning. They burned George's fingers that had touched them. . . .

George lay dreaming, drifting on unknown seas. Odors were wafted to her from the Polynesian Isles, which she saw rising from the emerald sea, rows of madrepores and mangroves, with a fringe of foam. These archipelagoes were unknown ground to her. . . . But their perfume penetrated her all the more intensely. And her footsteps freed the spring of that strange emotion we have all experienced, at the shock of certain meetings, in places where we have never before set foot:

"I have been here before. . . ."

She? She had been here? How could she have been? . . . She had never loved. And at that very moment she was free and far from love. . . . And yet the love of this stranger rose from her heart like a well-known peal of distant bells. All this old story was a tale she had heard told long ago, when half asleep, and had forgotten. After she read it, it seemed to her that she could have related every episode before she turned the page. And the figure of the woman was enigmatic and yet near to her at one and the same time. She did not feel her sorrow, but felt her impulses—not the melody, love or elegy—but the rhythm, the strength, the fountain spring, the blood. She could have sworn that she had seen her. . . . More! Known her. . . . More! . . . What more? . . .

George sat up so suddenly that she knocked her head under the table:

"More! . . . She is myself!"

But the blow roused her. She rubbed her head.

"Gracious! I'm mad. . . . I've forgotten to have lunch."

She had a hearty appetite. To forget lunch she must in-

deed have lost her bearings. She recovered them at once. But while she was swallowing belated mouthfuls, she kept upon the scent she had just picked up: Though she kept saying:

"It's idiotic."

She said to herself:

"He loved her before I was born."

And God alone knew what her feminine imagination stuffed with romanticized science would build up afterwards on that foundation. Before they were put away the poor letters were to be read and studied several times. Afterwards, George could have discussed the facts and dates with her father. If she did not, she came very near it, one evening; she bit her tongue, she would have liked to know. Those damned conventions! Why can't such subjects be simply discussed? . . . The subjects would not have stopped her. But she could not, in decency, tell him how she had got possession of his secrets. And yet how amusing it was, and touching! . . .

"The poor man sitting there, at the other side of the table, thinking that he is alone in the world with his mysteries, unaware that I know them, that I see him naked, with his sorrow, his love, his weakness, and his wounds. . . . And I am judging him. . . . I judge you. . . . You *have* made some blunders! You were not very bright. . . . Ah! I only love you all the more! . . ."

She went and kissed him. . . .

"Poor old dad! . . ."

He did not understand.

She set out upon the chase. She had made up her mind to find Annette. But she could not hope that her father would put her on the track. And discovery was not easy. The name of Madame Rivière was not to be found in

year-books. She might be dead, or married. It took time to get information.

George picked up the scent at last—Assia first, then Marc, whose youthful notoriety was spreading. She went to the bookshop two or three times, but she did not meet Annette. And she could not pluck up courage to go and knock at her door. So near the threshold, she drew back. She tried in vain to be bold and hustle things, she was strangely shy. If she saw Annette what would she say to her? So embarrassing, a tête-à-tête with such an intimate stranger, such a known unknown, whose secrets she had impudently broken into! . . . Such an Annette as George had imagined to herself would never forgive it, if she knew. And she would know at the very first words. George felt that she would betray herself directly she met that look. She would lose all her nerve immediately, and she would stand there open-mouthed, wordless, and blushing! Then to get out of her embarrassment, like all shy people she would abruptly and clumsily let out, as if in defiance, all the confessions she was hiding. Annette's eyes would become icy, at once, and she would shut the half-open door of confidence. And the ditch would become more impassable than ever. . . . George had not the courage to attempt it. Yet she did not give up her project. But she waited some opportunity or other, which would help her, or force her to dare. The opportunity must come. It would come!

It does not come to the majority of those who wait: because they wait passively. But George's waiting was, like herself, always active and ready for action. She did not sleep, she watched. In short, when opportunity is lacking, it is much less because it has not come than because one has not seen it coming, and seized it on the wing as it passed. No danger that a George would let it pass! A look, a leap and she will catch it, like a ball.

XXXI

Who threw the ball this time? A stranger. A partner from Italy. He also had met Annette by chance. But it was not chance alone, it was life's destiny, it was a kinship of mind that had brought him into touch with Julien and which, under George's impulsion, was to make him the messenger to open the door between the two old friends.

Annette was far from expecting him! . . . That morning she was sitting tired out, with aching legs, in a corner of her room, which she was cleaning out. She had no servant, only a daily woman, who came for a few hours to do the heavy work. She was alone, rather forsaken by her children, who having no more troubles to bring her, kept their pleasures and activity to themselves. (Activity shared by two is the greatest pleasure!) She had not the bad taste to complain. It is a mother's business! When children are contented, they put her out of their thoughts, like a good housekeeper. She has done her work, and goes away . . . Annette smiled. But her loins were aching. She was no longer young. And she had borne more than her share of her own worries and those of others. She sat there languidly with her weariness and her thoughts, holding the duster with which she had been rubbing the furniture. The window was wide open onto the street. The cold air chilled her shoulders. But she noticed it no more than the noises of the street. She was thinking. She was thinking that it is very good to sustain those whom we love. But it would be very good to be sustained a little too, now and then! And it was a rare luxury. She did not blame anyone. People

can give only what they have got. And every one of the men she had known had only just enough for his own needs. With affectionate irony, she saw all those who had drunk her milk passing before her eyes. They filed past, in no order, and their reappearance was often unexpected; among known and familiar faces, others arose which she had thought forgotten, and among them faces scarcely seen for a day, but whose real features showed themselves (perhaps by contrast) for the first time, in full light. And by one of those mysterious flashes which seem like a ray projected by the coming moment, a face rose from the gulf of the past, of which Annette said:

"That one took nothing from me. He gave."

She was surprised that she should so have forgotten him, that, for the moment, she could not even remember his name. . . . And just at that moment the door of her room was thrown open, and the untrained servant girl, without any announcement, showed someone in:

"It's a gentleman, Madame. . . ."

With a start, Annette saw him whom she had just evoked, standing on the threshold: an old-time white-bearded face, a beautiful smile, clear eyes. Though the meeting was so unexpected she did not hesitate for a moment. And the name she had been seeking immediately came to her lips. She stretched out her hands to him. And only after that did she feel ashamed of having been caught in her disorder of soul and dress; but she laughed good-humoredly when she found that she was still holding the duster. He laughed with her, apologizing, and excusing the servant whom she was scolding. He had seen the warm frank flash of joy in her eyes that had welcomed him. The same impulse drew him towards her. Though he was almost an old man his youthful eyes were twenty.

Annette had met him seven years before, in the train, going through the south of Italy. She was returning from her stay in Rumania.[1] Hardly recovered from an illness, and still feverish, she had an overwhelming longing to sleep. But she felt that she was still in the jungle—the reedy jungle into which she had fled and where she had sunk waist-deep in the mud; the fever lands, the great Italian marshes through which the train was passing, reminded her of it, and she sat up, stiff, tense and shivering. She struggled against sleep; it overcame her sometimes, and her head fell forward, but she woke again with a start, and held up her head, looking distrustfully at her neighbors, with knitted brows. They were nearly all peasants, and little Italian bourgeois. She was traveling third class in a crowded middle compartment; at the stations still more passengers were piled by main force into the already over-crowded carriage; they sat upon the knees of the others; a woman stood swaying about, clutching a chance shoulder here and there; the men smoked, spitting between their legs. Annette squeezed herself into her corner, in disgust, not daring to move her feet. Above her head, a man stood with his elbows on the partition which ran halfway up between her compartment and the next. Nearly all these people were pale, hollow-cheeked, with a fortnight's beard; one old man had a ring in his hairy ear; some had feverish eyes with yellowish whites; others had beautiful bright pupils, like animals; a boy who was resting his chin on the partition of the next carriage, just opposite Annette, and a little girl sitting in the spit on the floor, never took their sharp eyes off her. Conversation went on between the three compartments, in a rough dialect, and now and then a wine-flask was passed over,

[1] "The Death of a World."

or a sour-smelling cheese. In her nightmare of fatigue, Annette felt like an animal of another species, shut up in a cage of strange disquieting beasts that sniffed at her and were gradually drawing in around her. She summoned all her strength, in vain; she saw them awaiting the moment when she would sink exhausted, to fall upon her. She went under. Her heavy head fell against the wooden back of the carriage; and the upper part of her body slipped down. At that moment—she had not quite lost consciousness, but she had given up the struggle and abandoned herself to sleep—she felt gentle hands behind her, holding her by the shoulders and under the arms, and slipping a bag under her head. Her heavy eyelids opened for the last time, she just caught a glimpse beneath them of the man's eyes. He was leaning over the partition, like Rubens' man over the cross, supporting her body, and laying her down. It was like a lake in the mountains. A feeling of perfect security. She let herself sink into sleep.

When she emerged an hour later, the air was lighter round her. She saw that her neighbors, kind souls, had watched over her sleep. She found her cheek resting on a shawl which an old peasant woman had made into a pillow for her. And the little girl at her feet who was biting into an orange held it out to her. Seeing her open her eyes, they all complimented her with jocular good-nature. And she answered with the same laughing friendliness; there was no more embarrassment between them: they were all of the same species. She knew whence had come the stroke of the wand, the reverse of Circe's, which had changed the beasts into companions. The magician was behind her. She had no need to turn round and look at him. His grave musical voice cast a net over all these beings crowded together; it had made communion of sympathy and interests between them; conversation was gen-

eral between the three compartments, and though he did not assert himself in the least, it gravitated round him. The looks of all the speakers nearly always converged upon him, and as they had to pass over Annette's head to reach him, they stopped on the way. Annette was included in the conversation. And as her ears gradually grew accustomed to their speech, she joined in, in halting Italian which made them chuckle kindly. She was surprised to hear the man she could not see answer her in very pure choice French. They continued their dialogue without her attempting to see him. He inquired discreetly where she had come from and where she was going, and gave her directions for her journey. He did not talk about himself, and she asked no questions. The peasants addressed him as *"Signor Conte."* And she knew he was elderly: he had alluded to certain events that he had witnessed in those regions more than thirty years ago. He spoke with familiar courtesy. She liked to picture him to herself without seeing him. But she knew that he saw her, and she felt that she was under his care: this did not displease her; it was as if they had made a secret compact. . . . "You are taking care of me. . . . I trust you."

And it was most remarkable that her trust was justified in danger. They were jolting along slowly, careless of the coming moment. Suddenly there was a terrible shock, a clatter of iron, of broken glass and wood; the carriage cracked like a nut, and fell to pieces. Everything went down, amidst howls like those of slaughtered beasts. Annette found herself beneath the ruins, on her back, caught between the shattered seats and trampled by the feet of the maddened herd (the companions had turned into animals again). And to put the finishing touch to the panic, the wreckage caught fire. After vainly trying to free herself, Annette, paralyzed in all her limbs, abandoned herself to her fate. She lay on her back, her head a little lower than her body, and she felt a warm fluid flowing from a cut above her chest, but she could not feel the wound. In the pandemonium around her, she could see between a crack in the wreckage a lovely piece of sky from which the sun had just disappeared. And she was amazingly calm. She could hear the sinister sound of the fire gnawing its way: and over her head, across the tender sky, the wind blew down the black smoke in which bits of burning wood exploded, like chestnuts among the embers: and within a few yards of her imprisoned body, the noisy breath of the furnace blew against her cheeks. She waited. She was waiting for *him* to save her. She had no reason to believe that he was still alive, or that he was thinking of her. But she was sure. And she was not in the least surprised when she heard his voice calling:

"Cara Francia, are you there?"

She answered:

"Present, friend!"

He found her almost immediately, and she saw through the crack his anxious fraternal look. He lost no time in exclamations. In the twinkling of an eye, he had gathered a willing band, and organized them, to set her free. It was dangerous work. The least false move might bring down upon her the heavy masses, held suspended by chance. And yet there was no time to spare. The tongue of fire was almost licking the woman's feet as she lay. She did not speak. She left it to them. But as they gradually got her shoulders free, she felt the wound more. And she thought she was going to faint. But she smiled trustfully at her rescuer, who, with infinite precaution, was freeing her imprisoned head and pressing her temples between his hands, saying:

'Courage! It is nearly over."

She said:

"I am not afraid. I am in your hands." He was touched by such confidence:

"My brave child. . . ."

She lost consciousness with the pain. For a few minutes. . . . She recovered it almost at once. They had got her safely out, and were carrying her away. She said:

"No! I want to walk; I can."

"You are hurt," her friend said.

"There will be time to think of that. You must save the others first."

The broken carriage was a furnace. It was impossible even to go near it. The other carriages had resisted better; but the fire would reach them in their turn. The rescuers busied themselves with extricating those who were still caught in them. The greater number had fled, and rushed shrieking over the plain, like frightened poultry. Some were seen to stumble and fall; they lay yelling on the ground. In their panic, they never thought themselves far enough away from danger. Some were rallied, with great trouble. It was here that the *signor conte* showed his calm authority. He did not shout. He did not excite himself. He walked quietly in the midst of hysterical gesticulations, he took this or that man or woman by the elbow; he impressed his will upon them at once; their screams stuck in their throats; he said:

"Come here, my good soul. . . . Now, my dear chap, keep that chest note for your début at the San Carlo. . . . With such lungs, at least blow the other way! You're blowing up the fire. . . ."

They laughed. He did what he chose with them. In a little while they had finished digging out those that remained to be rescued. They lined up the wounded at some distance from the railway, in a ditch, sheltered by an embankment. The Count had a small surgical case; he busied himself hastily dressing the worst wounds. He looked round for the Frenchwoman. He saw her, a few paces off, leaning against a twisted olive-tree. She still felt within an inch of fainting, and was biting her lip to keep herself from going off. He left the others, and said:

"Your turn!"

The dry plain all round her, no shelter, and all those eyes looking at her. . . . She said:

"The fortune of war!"

She undid her dress. The blood stuck to the stuff. He ripped it with a penknife. Between the breast and right shoulder, a piece of wood from the broken carriage had made a gash. The blood ran as he tore away a strip of the chemise. She stood there with her arm raised. She looked like an Amazon in the battle. The indiscreet crowd naïvely expressed the appreciation of connoisseurs in fine figures, and fine wounds. The *signor conte* felt, washed, and rapidly dressed the wound with deft and delicate fingers. An old peasant woman was helping him. He asked:

"Am I hurting you?"

Annette answered:

"I have gone through worse! . . . Haven't we, mother?" (She was addressing the old woman.) "Men are very proud of their war wounds. We have had ours for a mighty long time! But we never think of boasting of them."

"In what battles?" asked the Count.

"*Si, signori!* Those in which you were calved."

The crowd laughed. An old man said:

"Bravo! And the minxes do not only make calves, they make horns too."

But Annette was putting up a front to save herself from fainting. She was speaking in a mist. Her physician was not taken in. He said:

"And now, lie down!"

She persisted:

"Is there nothing I can do to help you?"

"There is nothing more to do but to wait for a relief train from Taranto."

They had a long time to wait. It was still the period of post-war disorganization. The victims of the accident camped on the plain. The night was clear and cool. They made great fires with the train wreckage. Annette and the Count sat apart talking. Far off, to their right, smoked the remains of the conflagration. And from very far the murmur of the Tyrrhenian Sea was borne to them on the wind. The hours went by under the marvelous canopy of the Italian night sky, where the stars hung suspended like golden grapes that the hand might reach out and gather from the trellis. The two chance companions exchanged affectionate compliments upon their mutual courage: they had not the bad taste to express surprise at it. But Annette attributed hers to the confidence with which the other had inspired her; and she asked the reason of the great calm which he spread around him, and which is so rare a benefit in life: whence had he drawn it? Was it from this sky, which was so akin to him?

He answered, staring at the fire. The flame and moving shadows cast a tragic tremor on his smile:

"I drew it from this earth, which swallowed up all that I loved."

Annette leaned towards him, in silence. He continued, without looking at her:

"Friend, this hard parched earth on which you are lying seems dead to you, like a planet grown cold. You do not

feel the fire of the forge. Listen! You will hear the hammer of the cyclops. You cannot hear? Day and night I never cease counting out the iron rhythm. . . . And I hear Messina falling into ruins. . . ."

"Were you there?" asked Annette.

"With all my family. My mother, my wife, my brother, my four children. . . . They are there still. They lie beneath it."

Annette, shocked, took his hand. He pressed it, and holding it in his, in the calm night, told her of his life.

We will tell it after him. But we will do it less soberly. Many of his personal traits were not revealed to Annette till long afterwards, little by little. In this first account he gave her only the broad outline. But we, little gods, who have the privilege of reading the destinies of our children, let us unfold the Book of their life!

XXXII

He belonged to an old Sicilian family. Count Bruno Chiarenza. An ancient name illustrious in the time of the Normans. A few fine remains of great possessions, at the gates of Messina, on the heights of the town; not far from the ruins of Matagrifone an old uncomfortable house, the façade giving onto a narrow street, but the entrance enriched by a Della Robbia bas-relief. At the back a wood of orange trees in graded terraces descended to the sea. Here the Chiarenzas had led for centuries a simple rustic life, with the noble traditions of a humanistic spirit, a little out of date, but redolent of the honey of Theocritus. Their slumber after the glorious turbulence of olden times was made peaceful by tourneys of provincial philological and poetical academies bearing the names of heraldic monsters: Lynx or Griffon. In these they expended a good deal of idle ingenuity and real Græco-Latin erudition, which they transmitted from father to son, and sometimes from father to daughter. Since Pythagoras, Great Greece has admitted women to equal rights of the mind.

Count Bruno, while amusing himself, had acquired a well-deserved reputation in academic Hellenism. While cultivating his orange trees and sharing with a brother, his deputy, the products of a sulphur mine, he published epigraphic memoranda and an Orphic anthology. He even poetized on his own account, both in Greek and in Italian. He had reached the age of forty ignorant of life's hardships. Surrounded by affection, and affectionate himself, he had received from his intelligent parents comfortable means and a taste for disinterested work, which is an added pleasure, and the indulgent optimism which

costs nothing to those who have had to do only with the smiling face of "*the Mother.*" These belletristic gentlemen shut out of their garden the echo of the bestial struggles which in Bruno's childhood strained the spines of their neighbors, Calabria and Basilicata—the social warfare between the *galantuomini* and *cafoni*—and the dreadful poverty. Count Bruno had never taken the trouble to visit, even once, the sulphur mine, the revenues of which enabled him to write down his "golden verses," or those of Pythagoras. His brother, who seldom went there, had amiably prevented him, with a brief allusion to the dust, misery, and necrosis; he sincerely deplored them: they were a necessary evil; but it was not necessary for the Counts Chiarenza to go there and sadden those clear eyes in which the nymph Galatea, their neighbor of mythological fable, surveyed herself. Every man to his trade: theirs was to realize beauty, by the pen, and (were they not worthy of it?) by their lives.

Count Bruno was well endowed for such a mission. His beautiful hands, deft and nonchalant, brushed shadows from his path without effort. Amiable, charming, and easily charmed, he had not lacked *amours*, which, thanks to his charming nature and his superficial but spontaneous kindness, he had been able to enjoy, interrupt, enjoy once more, or break off, leaving no bitter dregs at the bottom of the cup, either for his companions or himself. Fairly early in life, at twenty-six, he had married a young girl of the wealthy bourgeoisie of northern Italy, a blue-eyed brunette of Vicenza who adored him, and whom he cherished. And it was a perfect union blessed by four births, four charming healthy children. No illness, no cares, happiness so constant that it did not even seem possible that it should be otherwise. He and his might have been tempted to think that misfortune is the

fault of those who do not know how to manage, or whose propensity to grief is a vice of nature that ought to be medically treated. Such a spirit evidently presupposes a good dose of indifference to the rest of the world, but this selfishness was so amiable and simple that it was never offensive. It must also be said in its defense that the misfortunes of others had the good taste not to make themselves too conspicuous: the despair of the population of the *Mezzogiorno*, through centuries of suffering, had reached that last degree of apathy, when they would not have raised a finger to make a change, for fear of feeling their pain more. Their bitter wisdom is expressed in these words of dreadful irony:

"*Addó ne'à sfizii, nun c'è perdenza*" ("Where there is no impulse to resist, there is nothing to lose").

And the old wolves of politics, who knew it, took good care to make no change in their misery; for they would have risked waking them up. One of these augurs has said:

"*It is best to let sleeping misery lie.*"[1] But the time was coming. The time had come. From the first years of the century, the new public taxes which were the result of the African disasters, and the new spirit which began to blow from its apostles, galvanized the paralysis of the *Mezzogiorno* and drove their despair to fury. There arose from the agonizing land the bloody revolts of the Pouilles, and of the Fasci, in Sicily. Count Bruno was forced to perceive it. It was from no bad faith that he did not see sad and unpleasant things: he was content with not going in search of them. From the moment that he saw misery and suffering around him, he and his were charitable to prodigality. But it was only in an occasional

[1] Agostino Depretis.

and intermittent fashion. It was a case of: "*Out of sight, out of mind.*" His amiable eyes had so much to occupy them! He had one of those happy natures favored by fate, to which all is enjoyment, without vulgarity: intelligence, work and pleasure, and all the actions of daily life. And he created this atmosphere of happiness around him.

Thus it was:—until that night of December 1908 when the bosom of the old chained land was raised by a gust of fury or a sob. And in three minutes, the whole of Messina, ten centuries of glory, and twenty-five thousand human beings, were swallowed up. All Count Bruno's family: his old mother, his brother, his wife and children were buried in the ruins.

They had been gay the night before, sitting up late, in honor of the brother who had arrived from Rome during the day; and in the rooms on the first floor looking onto the garden of orange trees they had talked for a long time, or listened to the soft silence of the night, and to music. The young sister-in-law sang Bellini: she had a pure weak voice, like a nightingale's; and Count Bruno sat with closed eyes, lovingly enjoying it. The girl knew it, and kept her eyes upon him as she sang. Their tender flirtation was an open secret; and no one thought of being scandalized at it. Even the wife and sister smiled at it. Bruno was the spoilt child; everyone thought it natural that everyone else should love him, and he himself was the first to think so. He was not conceited. He loved them all, and they all loved him. So everyone was satisfied. His little daughter, his youngest and favorite child, Sibylle, whom he had so named after the last charming queen of Normandy, sat near him on a stool, her cheek resting on his knees as she looked up at her beloved

father, who smiled at her under his half-closed eyelids; he stroked her silky hair; and he felt beneath his fingers the emotions inside the little round head. The child was too sensitive, more delicate than her brothers, and the stress of growth gave rise to little upsets of her feelings, passing fits of melancholy, and unexplained fears, which they all made fun of: Bruno was destined to remember them later. Now that night, the young mother, a fine pianist, who had been Sgambati's pupil in Rome, letting her hands stray over the piano, had an obscure impulse (why?) to break into the mysterious *andante* of the Seventh Symphony. At the first *crescendo* of the sad inexorable March (they call it a wedding march, but whose? a wedding with death?) the little girl burst into sobs, cried: "No!" and ran away. They changed the music. Her father took her in his arms. They went to the window. The child was prattling again, and one of her little hands twisted her father's beard round her fingers. The two young women, her mother and aunt, also came to the window and breathed in the fragrance of the garden; both leaned on Bruno's shoulders, without jealousy. Flora, the wife, said to her sister:

"Come, Gemma, kiss him, you're dying to, and he can give your kiss back to me!"

From the foot of the cliff, they could hear the sound of the sea's lips against the shore. And in the sky, above the roof, the fiery eye of the Cyclops: Sirius. The three of them stood silent, cheek to cheek. And in his hands, that little bird, the child's palpitating heart.

Happy nights have no history. The clasp of love is begun in a dream and ends therein. And the mind does not distinguish the moment when it recovers consciousness. That last night did not hear the child Happiness,

the familiar guest of the house, suddenly break off his song, and fly, weeping, far from Messina.

Husband and wife woke at the first shock. Bruno felt Flora's foot tighten suddenly on his, like a bird on a branch. Dawn was pale at the windows. With one impulse they found themselves sitting on the bed, with bare legs, ready to jump up. The bed was shaking, the house cracking from roof to base. And outside, a noise of tiles, and breaking windows, a chimney clattering down. . . .

Earthquake is a well-known visitor in those parts; and though the easy-going South soon forgets, when its visits are far apart, everyone has learned, from father to son, what must be done. Lose no time in lamentation. Fly to open spaces. Or if there is no time, lean against a main wall. Flora rushed to the other rooms, where the children were already screaming, to carry them into the garden. But a second shock, then a third, more violent, like a heaving wave, made the whole house rock; the walls of the rooms swelled like sails; the great *soffiti* of the ceilings twisted; bare feet stumbled on the uneven floors; and from without arose the thunder of the town and of the sea. A clamor as of the Day of Judgment.

It was but the space of a few seconds. In such moments the distracted brain perceives only the shriek of its own terror. Bruno realized that there was no time to escape by the staircase; and calling to his wife to follow him, he rushed to the balcony; for his instinct, in which there slept the seed of some very old experience, suggested to him that when the house is falling, one must get as near as possible to the outer wall, so as to have more chance of being rescued from the ruins. But for all the rest of his life he reproached himself for having followed his instinct, instead of rushing to the others, to rally and save them, or to

die together. For none of them had understood his intention, and he had no time to explain it to them. . . . Last picture . . . At the next window, the young bare breasts of Gemma, who held her arms out to him . . . And Sibylle's tearful cry, calling, "Papa! . . ." With a thundering crash, the ancient dwelling collapsed. Everything disappeared with Bruno's consciousness.

He came to (when?) in a berth on a ship which was carrying him away from the accursed coast—then (flashes of consciousness rose at long intervals from the darkness, and fell back again) in a hospital in Naples, after dangerous operations. He had sustained a fractured thigh, fracture of the skull, and concussion of the brain. He could remember nothing of the past. The first thing that came back to him was the anguish and sorrow. But he could not attach them to any fixed point. They were in a dark cloud. He could not link the two ideas together; he wore himself out struggling to reach the light; and he trembled at what the light might reveal . . . It came suddenly! The cloud opened. He heard Sibylle's feeble cry. He cried out:

"My little one! . . ."

He made an effort to rise; but he was under restraint; he bruised himself against a wall. The nurses held his arms. He continued calling out:

"My darlings! I am here! I'm coming. Where are you?"

They did their utmost to calm him. He succeeded in reconstructing in his mind the last moments before the collapse, and he begged them to tell him where the others were: he wanted to be told that they were saved. His nurses took care not to contradict him; they put him off with vague assurances, which did not deceive him for an instant; but he made them repeat the words over and over again: otherwise he could not have lived, and in spite of himself, the selfishness of life forced him to do so. But a few days later, after he had long weighed every word, every look of those around him, and his own memories, his eyes implored the doctor, who was bending over him, and whom he knew (he belonged to a family of the *Mezzogiorno*, who were on friendly terms with the Chiarenza); he said: "I know, I know. . . . I am not asking you whom I have lost. . . . I am only asking whom I have left!"

He saw such compassion in the eyes he questioned, that frozen with terror, he gripped the strong hand that rested open on his bed, and he cried:

"No! Someone is left. . . . Who? . . . Tell me who? . . ."

The doctor bent down and kissed him. It seemed as if he was going down, a second time. From the depth of the abyss he sobbed:

"Why, why have you saved me? . . ."

The next day he sobbed no more, he had not a tear left. His face was ravaged, but calm, as he made them tell him the details gathered from eye witnesses. He alone had been found, half-buried, on the edge of the ruins. All the rest was one great heap. There had been no means of making a search. Arms were lacking. The whole town was in ruins. The few hundred survivors were given up to bestial panic, in which the spur of unsatiated death (the earth was still rumbling, and from hour to hour the last ruins could be heard falling) brought forth the inner lust and cruelty of these damned souls. A people lay beneath the ruins. And God was under the ruins. Those who were alive were dead in their souls, and male and female coupled on and under the altars. The first help, which came by sea, followed upon the atrocious sack by the barbarians. For scarcely an hour after the catastrophe

rapacious bands came down to pillage the dead. And a people came down from the mountains, robbers of ruins who for centuries had kept watch for the collapse of cities, like those who of yore kept watch for shipwrecks on the coasts of Brittany. Fortunately, Bruno heard nothing of all this till later. He had enough to do to bear up against the ferocity of nature.

He gathered up all his strength. He resolved to go back to the scene of the disaster. No hope was left. Three weeks had gone by. But he wanted to see and to touch . . . Ah! who can say? . . . Magdalen, who saw the Master's death with her own eyes, and touched his cold body with her hands, went back next day to seek him living, and she found the Gardener. . . . Whom would he find among the ruins? . . . They tried in vain to dissuade him. He was still in splints. He made them carry him on a stretcher. A devoted friend went with him. In spite of heavy weather, he lay on deck all night, staring, drawing out of the darkness, like a magnet, the land of terror, the proximity of which was signaled by the fires of Stromboli. To protect the wound in his skull, in which a silver plate with gold nails had been inserted, he wore a leather helmet, which made him look like a Norman Crusader. He too was bound for the Holy Sepulcher! . . . Sepulcher of a people. . . . "*Horror, Fetor. . . .*" As soon as they reached Reggio, the wind brought the stench. . . . The giant God was rotting under the hills of orange trees. . . . Almost vomiting in his litter, the crusader, with implacable resolution, had himself carried up to the place where his nest had been. From the day of the catastrophe no hand had touched the ruins. They discouraged effort. They rose in a pyramid, which by the derision of Fate was crowned with the fallen escutcheon of the Chiarenza; it bore beneath a torch the old device:

"*Per Chiarità Carità*" ("By Light, Love").

Beneath that mountain they all lay, all of his flesh, all his race. . . . "Love, Light." The torch was extinguished. It was the tomb of the Chiarenza. Let it remain so! . . .

He never rebuilt the house. Later on he had the *tumulus* covered with cement, and on the giant pyramid he engraved the inscription:

"*Ruinæ Sacrum.*"

Later, later, he would consecrate the altar to "the Great Mother" (*Μήτηρ μεγίστη*), "the Black Earth" (*Γῆ μέλαινα*).

As he returned by boat to Naples, he met another wounded man, another of the damned escaped from Hell, who related the haunting sights he had seen among the ruins, men swooping down on still warm bodies to despoil them, and how he had seen them break a suppliant's arms to tear off her bracelets. He cried:

"Let them all be killed! All mankind should be exterminated. Oh! when will the earth finish crushing her vermin?"

And in his heart, Bruno gave thanks to the Black Mother that she had, at least, saved his dead from the hell of men.

He shut himself up for nearly a year in an isolated house on the borders of the Maremma, not far from Ninfa and Cape Circeo. It was part of one of the many estates of the family, all of which now came to him; it was certainly the least favored; no member of the family had ever been there. The sparse population, whose flocks grazed among the ruins, nearly all emigrated to the mountains for eight months in the year, leaving three or four victims to guard their walls. They were ravaged by malaria. Not one of the kinglet proprietors, one of whom dominated the marshes from his eagle's nest, ever distrib-

uted a grain of quinine among them. Their bird-eyes found pleasure in that deserted immensity of reeds and water. Bruno remained there during the reign of fever; and he caught it. What did he care? The only human beings he had an opportunity of seeing during those months—an old woman who waited on him, her little girl and her young son (there was not a fourth in the forsaken district)—had the fever like himself. They never thought of being surprised at it. The boy (he was thirteen; and he was the man, the head of the family) knew, and said calmly that they were doomed. He had beautiful pure features, a bloodless complexion, eyes blazing with intelligence, a grave bearing, as of one conscious of his responsibility, a quiet and simple way of speaking, a serious mouth, enlivened at rare intervals by a childish smile. He was called Athanase. When, after months of morose silence, which this little comrade respected, Bruno at last consented to speak once more it was with the boy alone that he exchanged this bread of souls. And the child was strangely able to keep in unison. The eighth month, which marked the return of the living and their flocks from the mountains, had not elapsed before Bruno had lavished on the boy all the despairing passion which he could no longer pour upon his dead.

He took him away from that earth which was sucking his blood. He had given the mother and daughter a pension and settled them in Taranto. He took the dark-eyed boy, who seemed to have heard the same soul-call, with him to a villa on one of the last ranges of hills that dominate the Gulf of Taranto, between Metaponto and Sybaris. He taught him, and found his mind a marvelous field. Bruno's fevered solitude had laid open certain secret windings of his own mind, which he had hitherto neglected: the occult meaning of the old myths of Ancient

Greece, the beautiful texts and images of which had merely occupied the amused indifference of his learned dilettantism. And as during the long months of silence side by side, a strange harmony had developed between the man and his young companion, Bruno read his own visions in the boy's eyes while he himself was formulating them. And gradually, without realizing it, he molded his visions to the obscure shapes of that mind which was waking—and to the genius of that age-old land, where Pythagoras slept close beside them. Extraordinary conversations, in which the little creature, attentive, eager, but unamazed, received from the lips of the elder, who rediscovered them in those eyes like a burning abyss, the luminous legends of triple meaning of the profound theogony of the Orphics: the six generations of the gods—Dionysos, the sixth kingdom—and the Titans. To the child, whom neither school nor church had fished out of his fever-marsh, Christ had remained a "*forestiere*" (a stranger); he knew of His death only from the bells up there on the hills: He was a rich man! Someone he respected from afar, but had never known. Up to the eve of the catastrophe Bruno's practicing Catholicism had been amiable and skin-deep, but the heaving earth of Messina, with one thrust of the shoulder, had overthrown this along with his palace: nothing remained but ruins upon which the furious wind of despair had blown for months. In the days immediately following he had hated the God in whom he had believed. The ground was free for other gods And the grand myths which slept in the mind of this noble and learned Trinacrian opened their eyes to the Tarantine light, where the tales of the young Zagreus Dionysos, king of the Mysteries, had flourished. He was not deluded by them, as the child who listened to him might be, but as he related them, Bruno was struck by their di-

vinatory symbolism and their revealed accord with the implacable chain of destiny which overwhelmed him. And as the enlightened Sicilian was not much less superstitious than the child, he soon became drunk with the fumes of those dreams which the sun drew forth from that land of ghosts along with the sickly sweet odors of the waters sleeping level with the soil. His ruined town evoked for him the convulsions of Typhoeus crushed beneath the weight of Etna; and the ferocity of the Titans who traitorously seized the child Dionysos, tore him to pieces, and devoured him, were identified with the blind fury of the elements which had annihilated all he loved, all that, in the selfishness of his sorrow, was Life. . . . But that love, that life, were reviving. The eyes of the visionary found them once more in this child, whom his need to love, his vital instinct, had embraced. They did more: in the semi-hallucination which the light of this mirage engendered in his poet-brain, shaken by the catastrophe, the child was to him the very image of the child Dionysos risen again; and so he saw him suddenly, one night, just as he is depicted in the Homeric hymn, seated "*on the edge of the inexhaustible sea, on the jutting point of a promontory, his beautiful black hair floating on his shoulders,*" chilly, and feverish, wrapping himself in a tattered red cloak, and "*smiling with his dark eyes.*"

With the dazzling vision, his anxiety returned. For the young god, "*the suffering god,*" was he not to die once more? Too late, he perceived upon the lad's pale face, as he shivered in the sunlight, the shadow of the wing of *Mephitis*, queen of Fever. He had not had the prudence to uproot the sickly plant from that poisonous soil, and carry him far away to the North, to different air, in another land. He had been content to remove him a few miles from the fatal fields, and to go up to the hills, a

little further, a little higher. He could not even resist the dangerous fascination of often going down with him to the magic zone of ruins on the seashore. He who has once heard the voice of the sirens finds it very difficult to escape them. Though the danger be known, how evade the call of that oasis in the desert, those luxuriant shades, between which gleams the laughing eye of the vagrant courseless waters—that enchanted quietude, that flower of shimmering reflections of sea and sky. When Bruno perceived it, the mischief was done, the doom was sealed. It was too late to appeal against it. Besides, would there have been time a year earlier? The little god had been doomed from his birth. For thousands of days, for thousands of nights, the poison had accumulated in his veins, as in the arteries of the plain; with muffled steps the fever had worked on; it had penetrated to the depths, and now, in full possession of the place, it breathed forth its tigerish breath.

Bruno was appalled by the violence of the attacks: the chattering teeth, the chills that shook the boy's body from head to foot for hours, with deadly ague, the uncontrollable vomiting, the burning face and delirium. Bruno clasped his bird in his arms, vainly endeavoring now to warm him with his own breath, now to breathe coolness on him. And, like a mother, he wiped away the sweat that drenched linen and sheets; he sponged and changed the boy. He fought death inch by inch for poor little Dionysos, with his cadaverous face, swollen body, and thin limbs from which the flesh melted day by day. He was everything to him in the battle fought together: father, mother, brother and sister. He had staked all upon this being, all his love. This sole flame was the last brand on his hearth; his heart had concentrated in it all the rest of the vanished fire. If he had heeded the inward howling of rebellion,

he would have abandoned himself to frenzy, like the Titans of the legend. But he held in his arms the little Christ of Metaponto who was carrying the cross of his Passion—*Διονύσου τὰ παθήματα*—and who seemed conscious of it. The child never ceased staring at him with those deep dark eyes which in moments of delirium were a gulf, but where, even in the shadows, reigned a strange peace. And when the disease gave the broken body a brief respite, the child tenderly begged his friend for one more of his beautiful tales—a sequel, or the same ones over again. And Bruno, as if inspired by the appeal of the dying young god, revealed to him—and to himself at the same time—the mystery of his fate: the sacrificed Savior of the Orphic Gospel who, twenty-five centuries before the "*Durch Leiden Freude*" of our heroes, taught men, by his example, to conquer eternity by suffering and death—the god who breaks the wheel of birth to reintegrate his elect in the plenitude and joy of the One. Who can say if the child understood these thoughts? But his instinct was in accord with them. His original fatalism, as of a victim bound on the pyre, had betrothed him, from birth, to murderous Nature who was devouring him. He accepted his betrothed, his lady Fever with her eyes like a sunlit lake, and her necklaces of vipers among the reeds. It was *so!* He accepted. And now he was to wed her. Like a little man he firmly pressed the hand of the friend he was about to leave. . . . And when ague shook him, he seemed to ask pardon. He said, half-dreaming, that he was going on a "*pellegrinaggio pi l'Angile.*"[1] He stroked Bruno's cheek with his thin hand.

A deadly attack carried him off. He died, one day when the sun beat fiercely on the mirage of the marshes,

[1] On a pilgrimage to the Church of San Michele al Gargano—the Mount of Miracles, on the spur of the Italian boot.

his arms crossed, his wide eyes drinking in the abyss of the blue sky, blue without a fleck: his open mouth swallowed it. And in his own confusion, Bruno, hanging upon the boy's last breath, seemed to see the stream of the world engulfed by that mouth. . . .

To complete the symbol, the late autumn light failed. Winter was coming. Dionysos, the slain god, was disappearing. He would rise again, in the spring, as he whom the Thyiades saluted, the *Διζύτης*, the New-Born.

Bruno closed the eyes, washed the body, and buried it unaided, on the slope of the hills that go down to the sea, in the middle of a clump of young almond trees; and on the mound he raised a simple stele, with the single word:

Ἀθάνατος[1]

Around his child's mound the wings of the bees seemed to murmur two Golden Verses:

". . . *ἐς αἰθέρ ελεύθερον . . . ἀθάνατος θεὸς ἄμβροτος . . .*"[2]

Then he returned to the "*mortals.*"

[1] "*Immortal.*" The word recalls the name of the child "*Athanase.*"
[2] "*In the free ether . . . the God of Ambrosia, the Immortal. . . .*"

XXXIII

Two years had passed since the cataclysm. Very few still thought about it, when Bruno reappeared among men. But those who remembered, wondered, at the sight of this ghost, if they had dreamed it. The face of Count Chiarenza, the last of his race, showed not a trace of it. He not only never mentioned it, and let pitying allusions pass, as if unheard, but his calm features wore a grave detached smile. The trial had left its mark only upon his hair and his silky well-kept beard, which had gone prematurely gray (he was only forty). But he was in the prime of his strength—agile and robust of body. For those who did not know from what cloth of dissonances that harmony had been cut, it was a disconcerting sight. He was like a tree with all its branches lopped, growing straight upwards. The soft-hearted all but reproached him for it. Like Pecuchet, they had enjoyed the picture of the tree struck by lightning. Count Chiarenza did not tell them that the lightning had penetrated to his marrow; he was like the legendary salamander, fire had become his element. He dwelt in it, naked and alone. The whole edifice of his happiness, all the structure of his mind, all his past, had been destroyed, cut short, razed to the ground. He had had to begin everything anew. He had relaid his foundations, alone. How much blood it had cost him. But blood is the necessary mortar for everything built to last. Count Bruno realized that in all he had hitherto built, mortar had been totally lacking. All he had done, believed he had done, loved, thought, till then, was but a game. . . . Ah! lovely game! . . . When he evoked it heart-rending nostalgia swelled his

breast with sobs . . . But it was a game! And how could he be surprised that a breath, a shudder of the earth, had scattered the game to the winds. . . . Remained alone that which dies not: the terrible Spirit of the eternal One, its implacable light, and its implacable peace. He found it in the void made within him, and in the dying eyes of the boy. He found it under the wrappings of the mummies of those old Trinacrian and Ionian thinkers, which hitherto he had merely looked upon as precious museum pieces. They appeared to him now in their true light, in the catastrophic atmosphere which had been theirs, which was now his. And now that, following in their footsteps, he had accomplished his descent into Hell, he made their tragic and serene views his own.

It would have been of no avail that his intellect was conquered, if the smile of his young companion, in his agony, had not conquered his heart also. From his last breath he had breathed in Acceptation, εὐδιμονία. And if he could not help his wounds reopening in the night (how many nights!), night alone was witness; the blood of his wounds dropped into it, and the victim, lying still on his back, pressing his hands upon his heart, offered his blood in sacrifice to the celestial Harmony of which he was a poignant chord. And when day came, indifferent day made clear to men's eyes, not passing sorrow, but Harmony.

The total annihilation of his race had brought its whole fortune into his hands. It burdened him. He had no difficulty in finding a use for it. It was the time when Italy had, at last, discovered the unspeakable barbarism in which her wretched *Mezzogiorno*, left to itself, had been sunk for centuries. A whole generous-hearted generation had dedicated themselves to the appalling problem, well nigh insoluble, of rescuing that stagnant savage

land from the death that was eating it away. Even Parliament—the talkers—in place of action, had passed laws to succor it. And private initiative, making up for the insincerity of the State, established organizations for relief and reconstruction in Basilicata and Calabria. Count Chiarenza devoted most of his fortune to founding dispensaries, orphanages, and schools.

But it would have been giving him undeserved credit (and he would have been the first to repudiate it) to attribute his generosity to his good heart. He was as yet unborn to brotherly love. Ever since the catastrophe which had taken all he had among the living, he had a blind, hidden, unacknowledged grudge against those who were still alive. Even the illumination of his mind had not availed to heal this festering wound. He was ashamed of it and kept it out of sight. He endeavored, secretly, to cauterize it. He forced himself to frequent the company of men, to smile at them and help them. But he could not overcome his dislike. And he was not always successful in concealing it. Certain eyes had caught its icy flash. His only course was to force his mind to act, without the warm joy of love. He did good, endless good, by signature and by proxy. No thanks were required. He was discharging a debt that weighed upon him; and he said, mentally, to those whose claim was settled: "And now, let me see no more of you!" It took him a long time to become reconciled to the human countenance. Little Dionysos had to arise from the tomb.

The winter sun still lasted. It lasted for years. Count Chiarenza spent them in study and long journeys. In studying his ancient sages, the star of Pythagoras and Empedocles led him to the East. He had a slight knowledge of Sanscrit. He perfected his philological learning, and as his means enabled him to travel far, he spent

several years in India and Thibet. Between 1911 and 1914, he disappeared. No one ever knew exactly where he was and what manner of life he led. He kept silence upon that period, in which no doubt he wandered, as a pilgrim or beggar, on the high plateaux of Asia, or shut himself up for many months in some Lamaic monastery, in the concentration of initiation. Though he was so far withdrawn from the world of the living, he must there have acquired the amazing penetration which he afterwards displayed. In that light of the summits, his eyes, like those of a solitary bird, were purged of dust and tears and sharpened like a knife on the grindstone, and, like a knife, they pierced the human heart. He saw into the depths, and realized the Sorrow and Error of European civilization, the catastrophe and ruin hanging over the West.

He departed at the end of June, 1914, leaving his Himalayan hermitage, and coming down to the plains of the Ganges: for he had felt the earth rumbling under his feet; and he was going to meet the war, which very few in Europe had yet foreseen. He met it at Calcutta: there he saw on a poster the official declaration of the massacre; he was standing in a street where the blood of slaughtered goats trickled from beneath the gate of a temple of Kali. He embarked for Europe. For the intensity of his solitary concentration had revealed to him, like the clasp of two coupled bodies penetrating each other, his overwhelming identification with all the living, an identification which the selfishness of his grief had so long refused to accept. And he wished to bear his share in the trial of men.

He was aware of the futility and crime of this war; and despite the secret voice of his Latin blood and his sympathy with France, he did his utmost to keep his

people outside the carnage. But the people were not consulted. And when they were thrown into the shambles, Count Chiarenza went with them. He enlisted in the sanitary service, organized an ambulance unit, and devoted himself to it. He was ever at the most exposed points and with the most thankless missions, in Albania, in Macedonia, accompanying in their disastrous retreat, or their stagnation in the trenches, the troops from his *Mezzogiorno*, devastated by exanthematic typhus and malaria. He communicated his calmness of the depths to his staff under fire, and to the savage peasants of Basilicata in their agony; for he did not look upon his work as ended when a case was hopeless; it was then that his real task began; he helped them in their passing. He received the *grande médaille des épidémies* and the *croix de guerre*.

When the war was over (or suspended for a time) he devoted himself to uplifting that *Mezzogiorno*, which he had learned to know better from his "cases" and his martyrs. This time, he did not content himself with handing over most of his remaining income to *Associazioni* and *Opere nazionali*, who undertook to make use of them without his eyes seeing what became of the gift of his hands (for indifference can make capital of the maxim of abnegation which demands that the left hand shall not know what the right hand gives): he established himself on the spot, at Potenza, where hundreds of families burrowed underground like maggots, in *sottani*—dried-up cisterns, and caves. He enlisted in the crusade to deliver these betrayed, exploited, forsaken "sons of man" from their sepulchers, to fight for that unhappy land against the three succubæ, the three murderous Goddesses who suck its blood (Bruno had evoked them before Annette upon the hill which the deadly vapors of the marshes encircled with a moon-like halo): Poverty, Fever, and the Fire of the earth—and worse than these three, the fourth, who is called, as the case may be, Acceptance, Resignation, or Apathy, which is torpid passivity under the blows of a fate which its victims no longer even strive to avert. . . . "Since it has been so for centuries, so will it be for centuries to come. . . ." The Middle Ages still persisted, like an ulcer, in the side of a proud people, who were then tasting the bitterness of their disappointments in the victory, and whose rhetoricians incited them to vindicate the inheritance of the "*Imperium Romanum!*" But there was one part of that war heritage of glory, conquests and bombastic ideology that did not tempt them in those first post-war years: that of those legionaries of the old Republic who, on returning to their homes, laboriously conquered their own land—drained the stagnant blood of the fever fields, and reëstablished in the great body of Italy the arterial system of their mighty aqueducts. It was not only in the body that the blood needed to flow again, it was in the soul of those lands that lay as if bound by evil spells—they would have said: "*l'han pigliata d'uocchi*" ("the evil eye has touched it").

The beautiful clear calm eyes of Count Chiarenza engaged in battle against the evil eye. He went about the whole region, dressing physical and moral wounds, playing in turn the parts of doctor, apostle, and laborer, leaving everywhere a luminous track beneath his feet. A slender thread. But like Tom Thumb's pebbles, it enabled those who followed to find their way through the forest. For people followed him. He revealed to himself a genius for organization and a missionary zeal which he would never have suspected. His passionate idealism roused other consciences, men and women of the highest and lowest classes—a little cohort, ardent and pure to

a degree perhaps to be found only in that Italy where meet the extremes of the soul—mud and fire.

It was during one of his circuits in the *Agri*, in the south of Pisticci, that Annette met him in the train that goes up the valley of the Basento.

XXXIV

Count Bruno gave his confidante of a night only a fugitive panorama of the wide sweep of his life, which had embraced such different landscapes—the orange gardens of Messina, Dionysos of the fever in the shimmering marshes, dust of snow on the high plateaux of Thibet, and so many summits and abysses. But the broad outlines were clear cut as an engraving; they were imprinted on Annette's mind. With her quick intuition she penetrated to the hidden heart of that tragic serenity. She did not understand it. She touched it with her fingers. She did not try to ask her companion anything more. He had spoken without any questions from her. Without questions from him, she spoke in her turn, she told him about herself. It was a spontaneous impulse, in thanks for what he had confided to her.

When they got into the train again, they were old friends. Bruno took care of the invalid, who was still a little feverish from her influenza pneumonia, which was not quite cured; and though his own way did not coincide with hers, he would not leave her until, after a night spent at Naples, he had settled her, with affectionate solicitude, in the long train which was to take her back to Paris. Everything had been simple between them, there was nothing equivocal about their fraternization. Yet there was no question of meeting again. It was enough to know that they both existed. They regularly exchanged brief and faithful greetings for New Year's Day. Annette, too taken up by her tasks—the cares of her triple and quadruple existence (her own and those of her children and grandchild)—had neither the time

nor means to follow the career of her old Italian friend. She did not know that the name of Count Chiarenza had acquired a certain renown; and he was the person least likely to inform her of it.

Count Bruno had continued his social mission; but at the same time the old meditative and learned vein of his mind had been reopened, and considerably deepened and widened. The very works which he directed in Basilicata to drain and irrigate the land and infected waters led to archeological discoveries, which roused the demon of science and broke the seal of silence which had been set upon his tongue for twelve years. He first published a few pamphlets, then books, in which the new acquisitions of his mind in the domain of orientalism were added to his deep Hellenist learning. And though, with aristocratic discretion, he kept his personality out of his scientific researches, no practiced reader could fail to discern in the objectivity of his descriptions the depth of an original and solitary spirit and the harmony of a Mediterranean mind and style. Honors came unsought. Foreign academies, among them the *Académie des Inscriptions* of Paris, elected him as a corresponding member. Julien Davy, who by very different ways had inclined towards Indology, was among the first to perceive the new and antique grandeur of that mind; he entered into correspondence with him. The starting point was the discussion of the Pythagorean texts, which Julien was studying for his historical and scientific works; and it soon led to the most intimate problems of metaphysical and religious thought; in these discussions both men recognized their mutual sincerity, and their analogous, though so different, experiences of the abyss. They were friends before they acknowledged it to each other, for both had the same haughty reserve.

They were too detached from the political farce to imagine that they would some day be mixed up in it. But the farce had become tragedy ("*Commediante . . . Tragediante . . .*"); and by the misfortune of the times —the leaders of opinion and guides, both political and intellectual, having totally abdicated, or proved traitors— the liberties of Europe and all the sacred possessions of the spirit, conquered by centuries of effort, had been delivered over to rapacious bands who were tearing them to pieces. The few men whose consciences were not blinded were forced to become the awakeners and guardians of the rest—even though it was not their job. In shipwreck it is anyone's job to save if one can . . . Or all perish together. "But I will perish with open eyes! . . ."

Julien's eyes had already refused the bandage with which his colleagues, with frenzied docility, had blinded themselves during the war. He had scornfully rejected all offers to participate in infecting French opinion with lies and hatred. He had thus ruined his certain election to the Academy. And as we have seen, he had had the honor of being hissed, during his lectures at the Collège de France, by certain vigorous stay-at-home combatants. But they had not gone so far as to close his class. He still had—much against his will—a few right-thinking supporters, belonging to his old conservative Catholic world, who feared the scandal of forsaking one of their own caste whose scrupulous loyalty they knew, and in their hearts respected. They had contented themselves with putting an extinguisher on "defeatist" manifestoes bearing Julien's compromising signature. These were rare and little known, for the censorship used its scissors, and Julien's "*alma sdegnosa*" was averse to all publicity. His too clear-sighted pessimism had no illusions as to the futility of his isolated action. He was

content with having said "No!" to the traitors of his confraternity.

After the war, some were found in every country who had said the same. Naturally, their hands were outstretched to each other; and without their seeking it, the force of circumstances united these men in an international vanguard of the Mind, which was often obliged to oppose the monstrous abuses and crimes that resulted from the war and the fetid peace—the Tiger's breath. The most illustrious among these heretics was Einstein, one of whose first visits in Paris was to Julien Davy. And it was not long before their ranks opened to admit Count Chiarenza.

But he was in no hurry to enter them. He remained resolutely outside the action of the day. When Communist, and then Fascist troubles broke out in Italy, he took no notice of them so long as his activities and social work were not affected. He worked for all who suffered (*"And who does not suffer, at bottom? . . ."*) He did not interfere with politics. But politics came and interfered with him. Fascism tried to meddle in his work, to get control and annex it. He resisted with gentle firmness. And for quite a long time these brutal men, unused to sparing anything, still tolerated him, abashed by his unquestionable disinterestedness. They imagined that as millions passed through his hands, according to the excellent habit of professional philanthropists some of it must stick to his fingers. But nothing stuck to Count Chiarenza's white hands (not so white as they had been before he took to wielding the spade or trowel). He had completely ruined himself in the service of his vast starving family. The place was indeed without profit. It tempted nobody any further. But though lucre was not at stake, the spirit of violence and petty persecution could

not long leave in peace these bands of good Samaritans, whose only thought was to dress wounds, instead of inflicting them—which, it seems, is the virile mark of men who are really men, who make the new or old-new order, who make wars and revolutions—or unmake them. They did not attack him personally, for without his knowledge he was protected by certain dignitaries of the new power (an intelligent skeptical philosopher, director of Public Education, who relished, not the ideas, but the harmonious style of Count Chiarenza's writings), but they persecuted those who were inspired by his example and carried out his instructions, teachers male and female, who devoted themselves to the laborious mission of uplifting those forsaken populations: they tried to force these people to sign oaths of political adherence to the new despotism, established on the ruins of the Law by the treason of the very man who had constituted himself its guardian. Such oaths were repugnant to these men and women of good faith. To them conscience was not a game, as it was to the minister Gentile who, when Count Chiarenza came to protest against the violence done to the soul of his disciples, answered ironically:

"But, *caro mio*, does not the Gospel tell us that we must lose our soul, to save it?"

For Bruno had been obliged to make up his mind to leave the field of his labors, and come to Rome to defend his work and his people. And once he had come into the open, he witnessed the atrocious struggle which devastated and withered thousands of Italian consciences. He could no longer refrain from seeing, judging, and speaking. He even chanced to witness the violence committed against an old comrade in arms, a doctor, a wounded hero, decorated and respected, who was set upon, insulted, and savagely trampled upon in the streets by a

gang of good-for-nothings. After receiving his share of blows—for, of course, he intervened—he went into court to bear witness for his friend, in spite of the menaces and threats of death which could be heard booming outside. As may be supposed, it did not make him more timid in his speech! He used to say afterwards, laughingly, that against those "Houm,"[1] those black demons (black shirts and black souls), he had felt red revolutionary wings sprouting on his shoulders. He changed from defender to accuser. He called the court itself and the police to account for authorizing the violence done to justice and the liberty of testimony. His imposing figure, his great name, his speech—(he said he discovered the voice of a tenor of La Scala in his throat)—confounded his audience for a few moments. The public Ministry excused itself piteously, and silence was imposed without. But Count Chiarenza paid for it.

"And," he said jokingly, "it served me right; it recalled me to the serene indifference to the Wheel of Appearances on which I prided myself. The whirlwind of dust had caught me up again."

The "black shirts" were waiting for him outside the court, and he was nearly torn to pieces. It did not make him more prudent but only more ironical, and perfectly self-possessed: those who were interested in him tried in vain to keep him out of danger, by persuading him not to run into it. The moment was bound to come when they could influence him no longer. He refused to go abroad, though life in Italy was becoming more and more difficult for him. He had made up his mind to stay as long as he could lessen the suffering a little, and help the oppressed. He persisted in it, gentle and tenacious. And

[1] *In Thibetan the "Houm" are the black denizens of Purgatory.*

when it became impossible for him to help openly he did it clandestinely; cheating the surveillance of the police with Italian good-humor. He corresponded or collaborated, for objects of pure humanity, with the political enemies of Fascism.

Then he was imprisoned in his own house, but managed to continue, under the noses of his kindly jailers. In nearly every good old Italian there is a vein of the *Commedia dell' Arte* which can keep his heart merry in the most tragic moments, and is a great resource in apparently hopeless situations. The grave Count Chiarenza combined the magic powers of his "lamas" with the expedients of Punchinello to make his own keepers take a hand in the game he was playing for the service of humanity, the stake for which might have been his head. After having fooled them at his ease, after making them carry compromising messages without their big noses smelling a rat, the day before he was to be arrested and deported to the Lipari Islands he managed to walk quietly out of his house, leaving his good carabiniers waiting for him, not beneath the trysting tree, but outside the door of the bath-room, from which he escaped by a small round window onto the staircase (at fifty-six he was as agile and supple as a gymnast). He passed without hurrying, as if out for a walk, through the town of Piedmont, where business and the police had long detained him; outside the town he went on at the same brisk quiet pace all day and night without stopping; and when the wall of the Alps lay across his path, he scrambled up.

Here his experience of Thibet did him service. He was pretty well acquainted with those regions, and he had a military map; but he was ill-equipped for glacier climbing at the beginning of the winter: for instead of taking the easiest route, which would naturally prove a

mouse-trap, he made straight for the most perilous: the Saint Theodul Pass. Luckily he found connivance among the mountaineers, who without any show of understanding the circumstances, furnished him with spiked boots, ropes, a pickax, a shepherd's coat, and a little guide for half the way. Nevertheless he was in great danger, for in trying to avoid the Fascist watchers on the frontier, he wandered into the snow and lost his way. He had to spend a night against a wall of ice above a precipice; he would have been frozen if he had not had recourse to the Thibetan *toumo* practices which by their psycho-physiological mechanism teach how to stimulate internal heat (the virtues of these practices have been tested and sung by the great ascetic poet Milarepa). He arrived, exhausted and bristling with ice, icicles on his eyebrows and an ice-pack in his beard, at a refuge on Swiss territory, where he found a blazing wood fire and a hot drink provided for him by chamois hunters. He then became conscious of the deadly cold which held him like a shell, against which the inward heat had fought for fifteen hours. He nearly melted. But a dead sleep in a bath of sweat, under the care of these good souls, set him on his feet again; afterwards he went down with them to Zermatt, where he rested for a day or two, and then settled himself comfortably at Viège in the Simplon train for Paris.

He had been preceded by the rumor of his escape, clumsily set on foot, then still more clumsily denied, and proved by the anger of his abashed and crestfallen jailers and their Master, who vented his fury upon them. The Italian refugees in Paris, informed by telegrams from Switzerland, were waiting to greet his arrival; and for some days he was the prey of reporters. But the roguish Italian knew how to defend himself; he related his escape

from the *Inferno* and his *"salto mortale"* over the mountains like a scene from a Venetian comedy. The laughter of Paris at the expense of the cheated tyrant turned the knife in the wound. And rage produced dead silence beyond the Alps. But Count Bruno's adventure supplied the newspapers of Europe with copy for two or three weeks. The hero dodged his celebrity by accepting the offer of Julien Davy to take refuge in his house. It was a joy to the two men to meet at last after so many years of distant intimacy; and when the doors were shut and they were defended against intruders, it was not politics they principally discussed. They had recognized each other at the first glance as having touched the depth of tragic human experience, and having got out of it unaided by cutting steps, each with his own pickax, in the ice of the terrible wall. But the steps had not been the same for both. Nor the pickax. Nor the arm. Nor the mind either. One had chosen the ridge of the slope in the sun. Or rather the sun had chosen him. For the other, there was shadow. But both had reached the same level, or very nearly! And they exchanged a look of fraternal understanding.

Their dialogue was often interrupted—illuminated—by the presence of George. She was then in all the bloom of her twenty years; and she was quite smitten with the old Alpine climber; for she was chiefly fascinated by his athletic prowess. And as he perceived in her that healthy and carefree joy of athleticism, physical activity and adventure, he was glad to tell her of his travels in Thibet—omitting all that had to do with his researches into mind. They spent hours talking about these things, which did not interest Julien—old Bruno as childishly pleased to relate as the young girl was to listen. He gazed tenderly at her round young joyous face, the fine

sun-kissed skin, the firm tissue of her arms, neck, and cheeks, the bright eyes where never an intellectual shadow passed, not a sorrow, not a fear—nothing beneath the surface; but *what* was there was the world, and was enough! As with the universe of the ancients, "*finis orbis terrarum* . . ." Beyond the Pillars is Calypso. Let us remain on this side with Nausicaa and Penelope! . . . He called her: "*Mare nostro* . . .", Mediterranean. And on her mouth, a red and golden fruit, untouched by lipstick, he saw again, with melancholy sweetness, as in the mirage of a tender dream, the carefree happy smile of the young sister-in-law who sang Schubert's "*The Miller's Wife*" and the brook's lullaby, above the gulf of Polyphemus.

Now, one day when the three of them, Julien, George, and Bruno, were at table, in the course of conversation Bruno chanced to mention the woman, a Frenchwoman, whom he had once met on the roads—he might have said: on the rails—of Basilicata. And making enquiries about her, he said her surname: "Madame Rivière." George exclaimed, clapped her hands, and imprudently cried: "Annette?"

Which was the more surprised? Bruno or her father? How could Julien have imagined that his daughter knew anything about one whom he had never mentioned to her? He could not conceal his stupefaction, and George blushed. She bit her tongue. Too late! . . . "Well, then, out with it! . . ."

Brazenly, calmly, the little hypocrite with the shining eyes turned to her father and said:

"You know her!"

And she said laughingly to Bruno:

"She was father's very dear friend!"

She added:

"And now I want her to be mine."

Julien was in extreme confusion, which shrewd Count Bruno perceived. He frowned and tried to silence George with a severe look. But that was not going to stop her. She thought:

"I have waited for it long enough! I can't miss the opportunity. I'll jump at it."

And she said:

"Let's invite her here!"

Julien exclaimed:

"What is all this nonsense?"

"It's quite simple," said George. "I have wanted to see her for twenty years. I shall see her, at last!"

At this, Julien was completely at sea. He grasped the fact that his daughter knew all. He could not imagine how. (He never dared to ask her, even later: those memories were so sacred to him! He could not have mentioned them to anyone. It hurt him even to think that George knew anything about them.) He refused to give the invitation, and with clumsy abruptness tried to change the subject. Luckily for him, Bruno came to his rescue and delivered him from his tormentor. She pursed up her lips to keep from laughing; she was all aglow with mischief. Bruno looked at them both, guessed, laughed in his heart, had pity on the old child, and gently pulled the other one's ear. It was arranged that Mme. Rivière should be invited, not to Davy's house, but to a lecture that Bruno was to give at a meeting organized in the hall of the Sociétés Savantes.

For he had not been able to escape, nor could his host save him, from the obligation of taking part in a protest meeting of the French Anti-Fascist League of whose Ex-

ecutive Committee Julien was one of the Vice-Presidents. (Julien, as usual, had not tried to become one, nor to avoid it.)

It was done accordingly. But at the lecture, where Bruno delighted the audience by the simple and direct eloquence of his implacable indictment of the tyrants, Annette did not appear. She had influenza, and sat by the fire at home. She had not read the papers for a week or two. (Even women who are far from uninterested in social matters rarely have the constancy to show continuous interest. Their attention is subject to eclipses. The life of their heart engrosses them.) She knew nothing about Count Chiarenza's escape and his presence in Paris. And her son and daughter-in-law, who took good care not to miss the chance of seeing and hearing the "*fuoruscito*" at his meeting, never thought of mentioning it to Annette. They seldom saw her, and were absent-minded when they did. Completely taken up with the joy of their reunion, they were like school children on holiday.

George was disappointed. She searched the room, in vain, for Annette's face. She recognized (she knew everything, the little bright-eyed baggage!) Annette's son, and his "Moscotte," as she called Assia; she even gave herself the pleasure, though they did not know her, of introducing them to Count Bruno after the lecture, for they were both extremely eager to shake hands with him. But it was impossible to carry on a conversation in the crush of people crowding round the platform, and the presence of the young couple was not sufficient compensation to George: it was Annette she wanted to see—and to have.

Well, then, since she was determined (that was now quite settled!) who the devil could prevent her? She

never rested till she had inspired Count Chiarenza with the idea of visiting Annette. And she offered to go with him. He was not taken in, and on the way he tactfully got her to tell him of the old romance, which his shrewdness had guessed at. George was more than willing. The secret had burned her tongue too long. And the old Italian had grown to be her comrade in pranks, almost her accomplice. As she told him about her burglary, it seemed to her that he had helped her with it, had shared equally in her responsibility. At certain funny incidents they stood still, in the Luxembourg, laughing till they cried. And at the same time Bruno's eyes said, as he shook his head at her: "Shame! . . . you little thief! Aren't you ashamed? . . ." And she felt like answering: "What about you? . . ." It did not prevent them both from feeling the pathos of that poor, wasted, wounded love. And they were silent all the rest of the way. When they were near the house, George said:

"What I did was disgusting, all the same! You will never trust me again."

He asked:

"But if it was to do again, child, you would do it?"

She burst out laughing:

"Of course!"

They went upstairs gayly. But her heart was beating fast. Perhaps that was why she laughed so much. She refused to go in with him, saying that he would find her waiting in the square close by, when he came out. However, she consented to sit and wait in the hallway. She hoped (though she dreaded) that she would catch Annette at the end of the visit as she passed by to show Bruno out. But Bruno came to fetch her. In the middle of the conversation, after the first effusions between the two old friends, he remembered his Antigone; he said to Annette:

"Allow me . . . A lover is languishing at your door . . ."

And he went and took George by the hand. Though she was dying to go in he had to drag her.

XXXV

George had made a complete Annette for herself, different from the real one. She had made her—if not in her own image—at least in that of her kin. For she liked to think that her father was imbued with that image when he had begotten her. She knew it was a tale she had made up for herself; she laughed at it, but caressed it.

And the Annette she had invented had introduced her into the world of passion which George herself did not wish to enter; it was as if her double excused her from it by acting for her. The pleasure of that long dream, which had gone on for several years with no fever or stir, was to live over—in her own fashion, in comfort—the adventures of the other Annette, like a novel invented for oneself on the pillow at night. George had made up for herself a life of vicarious passion which she lived through like a somnambulist. Her real life was not troubled by it. It was the counterweight required for the balance of her strong nature.

Thousands of women are like that; they faithfully lead a quiet regular family life, and at bottom, in the depths of their being, they love, act, have adventures, and console themselves for their unused energy and desires. Mons Colas the Nivernois, with wise banter, would have said to husbands:

"Don't let it make you angry to think that your rib sleeps with a ghost! If you must be cuckolds at all costs, better be so in a dream! And peace to the dream and the dreamers. When they come back from a long distance, and do not hear what you are saying—with a vague smile, a strange look, and dark rims under the eyes—

smile kindly at the navigators! When they return they will find the fireside all the warmer . . ."

All are not (but many are) as innocent as George was. And with the right kind of innocence: that which does not dream of good or evil. It dreams . . . And that's all. The swallow glides through the air.

And now the swallow found herself beak to beak with her dream. And the dream was not a bit like the one she had been pursuing. Annette was not the double of anyone whatever! Annette was Annette, herself, and none other . . .

But what did that matter! The swallow, carried on by the power of her wings, caught Annette in her open beak. Annette was *real*. She might be anything she liked! It was Annette that was wanted.

They looked at each other. George, the tall girl, robust and brusque, with the resolute air, was suddenly stuck fast; she became shy; her bosom heaved, and she smiled foolishly. Annette, with her white hair, her calm forehead and tired face, saw in the intelligent mirror of her large and prominent eyes the confusion of the impetuous love of the big little girl. And the heart of the awkward Amazon melted at Annette's look; her firm knees trembled. She was ready to cry with shame. And as she timidly raised her lowered eyelids, she met Annette's understanding smile; plunging abruptly, she buried her burning face in the bosom of the woman who read her secrets and hugged her passionately. Annette cried out:

"Stop! Stop! . . . She's breaking me!"

George, abashed, released her. Annette raised the girl's head, saw her face, scarlet, happy, ashamed, with two big tears in her eyes. Count Bruno was laughing; Annette laughed; and George, wiping away her tears with the back of her hand like a boy, laughed too. And Annette asked:

"But who has given me this daughter?"

George answered:

"Julien Davy. I am his daughter."

Annette's large eyes grew larger. She said nothing. She took George by the shoulders, she gazed at her. And she said:

"Done! I adopt you."

XXXVI

George came again, in the morning. She came again in the evening. And the days following. The hall was full of flowers. There were not enough vases to hold them. She brought them in armfuls. She established herself in the house, she had already taken to addressing Assia as *tu*, and she took possession of the little boy. Assia willingly let her pet him and take him out. She knew how to make use of devotion and at the first glance she had seen the Amazon's readiness to turn herself into a nursemaid. George was one of those who have an obscure longing for a child. If one could have the child without the man! She was offered one all ready-made; and he was a slip of Annette. Double joy; and a pretext for taking root in the house. Annette had to remind her that she had a home of her own, and a father whom she was neglecting. She spent hours sitting on a low seat at Annette's feet, or on the floor with the child. She spoke; or did not speak: it did not matter, all she wanted was to be there. The attraction was extraordinary. She could not have explained it herself. And Annette was still inexplicable to her. If Annette saw George as she was (or pretty nearly), George never saw Annette except in the likeness of the romantic double she had made up for herself. Annette knew this, and shrugged her shoulders at it; there was no way of disillusioning George; and it was not worth while, since when all was said and done the real Annette loved her. George asked no more. Annette had been captured by the girl's warm, sincere, dumb appeal. One could not cavil at that unqualified gift of self! And as to George, it was enough for her that the

gift was accepted. She needed Annette; she was happy when she was in this house, happy when Annette's hand chanced to touch her, happy to breathe the same air. It was love, unformulated. For she was not very intelligent, she did not know her own inner world. She was like the unconscious expression of the homesickness which possessed her father, when she was born, thinking of his lost country. But in George, the homesickness was assuaged. She had found that country again.

In her happy selfishness she forgot him who was now forsaken in his turn—her father whom she never saw now except negligently at the evening meal, and who felt that she was absent, though sitting opposite him; she was in a hurry to finish eating, so as to be off again, or to shut herself up; and she gloated over her days. In his study he could hear her laughing and talking to herself.

It was Annette who asked George to bring Julien to see her. But Julien received the request coldly. He was moved to the bottom of his heart. By a misfortune of his nature, due as much to his qualities as to his failings —to his reserve, his pride, his humility (the two contraries are often associated)—Julien was all but totally incapable of showing his deepest feelings. The greater his love, or emotion, the less he showed it; he became congealed. He was the first to suffer from it. Through it he had lost his chance of any intimate communion with his daughter, who was quite ready to confide in him. At this very time it would have been a joy to her to tell him all that was in her heart, all about her days spent with Annette. But just try to tell your joy to a wooden face that, when he saw Annette's name or her image was about to come up in his daughter's chatter, seemed to protect itself by assuming a hostile coldness! Though George

knew very well what to think of it. . . . So much the worse for him! . . . With the impatience of youth, she got tired of it, and sought for someone to pour herself out to. Lacking response, she talked to herself.

"It's between the two of us, my girl! Warm up, warm up! I've got a chilblain on my tongue from rubbing it against that icicle. . . ."

And week in week out Julien found fresh pretext for not responding to Annette's invitation, without his daughter's insisting:

"No, don't let him come! If he came with me he would spoil my pleasure. . . ."

Annette did not sit down to wait indefinitely. She knew her Julien of old. She put on her toque, one evening, and said to George:

"I am coming back with you. Is your father at home? I am going up to see him."

George exclaimed:

"Whatever will he say?"

"Do you think he will turn me out?"

George laughed:

"No! But poor old dear! Without a word of warning! He might have a fit!"

"If he were warned, he would run away; we should never be able to put our hands on him!"

"Ah, yes! You know the rabbit! . . ."

"Disrespectful daughter!"

"To hell with respect! He bores us."

"Us?"

"You, me."

"Don't put me in the same boat! I respect everything!"

"Respect everything? You? Oh! Not really!"

"What do you mean 'Not really'? . . . I love and I fight:—therefore I respect."

"The rules of the game?"

"No, the enemy. One cannot fight well if one doesn't believe in him."

"By landing him an uppercut under the jaw! Yes, I agree with that."

"You believe in nothing but the game."

And very likely, of the two women, the one who believed only in the game was the readiest to forget that it was a game. But neither of them realized it.

They went upstairs together. George had her key. She preceded Annette into the flat.

"Father," she said, throwing open the door of his study, "I have brought your good friend."

If a thunderbolt had fallen, Julien could not have been more dumbfounded. He had not even strength to rise. Annette said:

"Forgive me! Julien, your daughter is a demon. However did you manage to make her?"

"I know very well what pattern I was cut on," said George.

Annette pushed her towards the door:

"Now, my child, leave us in peace! Get out of this! And (I know you!) don't go and put your ear to the keyhole."

George protested.

"Yes, yes, yes, yes," said Annette, "you know a great deal more than you ought to, already. . . . Out with you! Be off! Do you think we are going to act the scene of the two old people in *L'Arlésienne* for your pleasure?"

George, laughing, let herself be pushed out of the room. Annette came back to the writing table where Julien still sat, petrified.

"My old friend," she said, holding out her hand, "are you frightened of an old woman?"

Julien suddenly pushed back his chair, and unable to speak, bent over her hand, and rested his forehead upon it. Annette sat down. He would never have thought of offering her a chair.

"Don't be angry with me for coming! I had to, since you would never have come to me. Would you?"

"No," said Julien. "Never."

He had raised his head, and was looking at her with a feeble, still frightened smile of gratitude.

"Good! Let's say no more!" said Annette.

The two old friends gazed at each other. Both were studying the face they knew and the changes life had wrought in it. How weather-beaten was this house! But it had taken on a patina of shade and sunlight, as have those monuments of ancient Rome which reflect the assaults of time and the august calm of undiminished resistance. They did not exchange their thoughts. Annette read the locked book, which would not open—less than ever: for he knew she was looking at him, and he had much to hide from her. She had no difficulty in guessing and she pitied the repressed soul, who had lived alone all his life, and feared affection more than enmity: for he was unused to it, and he had no weapons against it but flight.

Annette broke the silence at last:

"Thank you," she said, "for the young friend you have given me."

"She is yours," said Julien. "The best thing I have."

"You have had a fine life," said Annette, with a grave smile.

"I would not wish it to my worst enemy," he answered bitterly.

"I would not wish it to anyone but you, for no one else would be worthy to bear it."

"What do you know of it?"

"I know it. I know your struggles. I have read your work. What I have not read, I have seen." (She closed her eyes). "I am proud of you."

He trembled:

"I . . . all that I am . . . all I have become . . . your work! . . . I lay it at your feet."

Annette trembled, in her turn.

"What have I done for you?"

"You have made me."

The gulf of silence opened once more. A warm torrent of emotion rushed into it. . . . George, pricking up her ears, on the other side of the wall, said to herself:

"Are they dead?"

Annette lifted a pair of moist shining eyes to Julien, whose look, like a faithful dog's, was fastened on hers; and her whole face was suffused by the rush of blood from her heart; but to Julien those flushed cheeks and that face were more beautiful than beauty. And she said:

"So we have not thrown our lives away."

Julien was about to answer:

"What use has mine been to you?"

But seeing Annette's joy, he felt that he was ungrateful; he wanted to kneel before her; his moral ankylosis prevented him, and his misfortune: he could see the ridiculous old man. . . . He stammered:

"If I have not thrown *yours* away—all sorrows, all defeats, and all the rest, are nothing—all is well."

They smiled at each other, exchanging their grave and silent gratitude. Then Annette got up, and said:

"Enough happiness for one day!"

She went out. On the threshold, he said:

"And when is the next installment?"

She replied:

"When you come and fetch it. The door of the days is open once again."

XXXVII

They met regularly. The old friends had their hours of conversation, which no one was allowed to interrupt. Though Julien had made the acquaintance of Marc, Vania and Assia, and very soon had his place in the family, he never thawed completely in their company; he grew stiff; Assia made him shy, and so even did Vania; he did not know how to talk to a child. Marc alone could read deeper than the savant's thoughtful brow, and he was eager to decipher the enigma of his intrepid and austere mind. But Julien was afraid of the other enigma: the searching scrutiny of this young man, whose strange preoccupations and bitter irony he could not understand, troubled him. He took refuge with Annette, who understood as well as himself the weaknesses, and better than himself the greatness, of his sad, proud soul; he did not need to explain himself to her. Even without speech, he was freed, at her approach, of the overload of his soul; it passed from him like an electric current; Annette was not overweighted but stabilized by it: it completed her freight; and the water-line of the vessel was but the better assured. Thus by their finding each other again, a secret law of their natures was fulfilled. The age of love was past; it was a question of more (and of less); the final chord of two beings, which closed the preëstablished curve of each of the two destinies. And without words—more often at night, from one house to the other, as each lay thinking in bed—each gave thanks to the other; and each realized that he had never ceased to dwell in the other's heart.

But the two dwellings were not equally full; and in

Annette's Julien occupied only one room. Julien's house lacked furniture and inhabitants; apart from Annette and his daughter, who had but a temporary camp there, it contained nothing but his books and his ideas: dust and cobwebs! . . . Annette's house was full: full of the past, full of the present; and there were still rooms awaiting visitors who might arrive to-morrow—who would arrive. No, the game was not equal! It never can be. There would be no game, there would be no life without a winner and a loser, one who gives most, and one who takes most. Julien gave most, having more to give, more affection to be disposed of. Annette could not dispose of the share she had given to others, or that she would give (for the future claims its share). Julien's share was good. He had to be content with it. If it was not sufficient for his hunger, it was his own fault: when Annette's heart was almost whole, he had let it escape him. He must be grateful for the portion she had saved for him. He was.

But not without regret, for which he reproached himself, for the other shares which were not his, especially for that which a new-comer, a new friend, Count Bruno, had taken to himself, without asking for it.

That happy man—that man, happy though all the blows of fate had fallen on him—had only to present himself everywhere to be loved, *"Veni, vici. . . ."* He thought it quite natural. And everyone thought it natural as he did. All was pleasure on both sides. People did not have to wear out their teeth, as with Julien, biting through a hard rind, that made the gums bitter, to get at the nut. The rind was as good to eat as the nut. No doubt his lightness was half his charm, the other half being made up of affectionate kindness and natural attractiveness. He cast no shadow on his path. All the

sorrows of life were reabsorbed in the light of his caressing blue eyes, which could not help being a little flirtatious to everyone. The old childlike man with his soft thick beard, which he stroked like a cat's back with his fine fingers, needed everyone's love and to love everyone. That did not prevent him from judging them with a disconcerting lucidity which went straight to the bottom and laid a finger on the sore point which was being hidden; but the finger was so gentle, so just, that the touch seemed a secret voluptuousness. And it established between the benevolent operator and the complaisant patient a bond of mysterious intimacy, of which both held the key.

The only one of them all who did not lend herself to this game was the hard prickly chestnut: Assia. She did not like all this gentleness—men too gentle, beards too beautiful, hands too fine and too well cared for, and a glance that slipped like a caress to the bottom of one's heart. She knew very well that he was good, that he was wise, that he saw far. But she did not care for that wisdom, for that goodness; she did not want to see far. . . . "I see close, I see my Marc, good or bad, I take him as he is, he takes me as I am, he goes where I go, and I know where I am going." She could not prevent Bruno from reading her, behind her shutters. But it vexed her and made her angry. And he, kindly, pretended not to look; but he could not prevent himself, and he laughed in his scented beard at the little frowning cat face.

All the others were conquered: the child and George, Marc and Annette. To the measure of their needs, all felt the benefit of that optimism which remained untouched by life's catastrophes and the blue eyes of reason. However irrational the optimism to which tragic experiences gave the lie in the depths of his heart, it was a relief

from Julien's kind of clairvoyance: a dark view, a pessimism which held out, stoical, indestructible, but with no joy of life, no spring. That optimism alone was efficacious, for it alone was vital: it responded to the deep laws of Nature in growth, which wills to live, without regard for good or evil, suffering, or the futility of efforts; it willed to live, and it lived, despite moral and rational laws which are those of exhausted Nature, of the logical man who is not wise enough to loose the thread of his distaff, of the man who thinks to the end—till he no longer lives. Bruno knew all about thought; his skillful fingers had no trouble in winding the skein thereof; but he knew how to listen to the song of the spinning wheel and to the song of dreams, the siren-song, which answered it from inside the house. He had once been her victim; but now he had caught her in his nets, the siren of Sicily; she sang for his pleasure and that of his friends, like a caged bird; and to those who listened, the song lightened the suffering of living. The bird did not hide that which caused suffering. It did not say:

"That which is, is not."

It said:

"That which is, is: therefore it is beautiful. For it is beautiful to be!"

And its beautiful voice, like a violoncello, perhaps a little conscious of its beauty, illuminated all that was beautiful or ugly, like a ray on the blue sea at the foot of the rock of death: Scylla.

It was that ray which had touched Marc's anxious brow. And the ray had rested on that young brow. They had been attracted to each other. At the first glance the wise old Sicilian had been struck by the pure and ardent disillusionment of that young face: this impassioned being was marked for death, he had already crossed the threshold. And Bruno was also touched by the great effort which he read in that tormented nature to liberate itself from the demons of violence and the selfishness of youth. He guessed those silent combats better than the wife, better than the mother; and the irascible, hard, even cruel, proud, tyrannical, rapacious, unbridled young man, who crushed, like little jaguars, the ribs of his instincts, captivated him by the very vigor of those instincts, and by the vigor of the soul which had subdued them: he saw Marc going forward, with the recovery of a young athlete, towards a state of renouncement, the heroic and fragile harmony of which was strangely moving. And so Bruno conceived for this child of twenty-five a secret and singular veneration, which was shown by the manner in which he sometimes spoke to him; he gave way to Marc—which he did for no one else, not even to women except with a tinge of worldly courtesy which diminished the effect. He seemed to bow before a mysterious future. Perhaps he could not himself have expressed the sacrifice he foresaw, the vision of an Isaac carrying the wood for his sacrificial pyre. And Annette, seeing Bruno, was troubled; she said to herself:

"What do his eyes see?"

And she did not dare to ask him.

But Marc did not notice it. He was too taken up with the problem set him by his destiny. He played his part, he acted his play, scene by scene, without troubling himself to know the end of the tragedy. But he acted badly, because, like the bad actors spoken of by Diderot, he was *too taken* by his part, he did not dominate it. And to get out of it, he needed rather Bruno's smile, which was new ground to him, than Julien's bitter vision, which was too like his own.

XXXVIII

The first benefit he derived from his contact with the old Ulysses was the appeasement and the reconciliation with himself which the troubled soul felt entering drop by drop. He had no need to confess the humiliation of the combats going on in his body and of the intruders that camped there, that horde of undesirable thoughts which he was not proud of harboring. Bruno's half-closed eyes had sought them in their nest and, without seeming to touch them, had taken the frightened birds into the hollow of his affectionate irony. One day when Marc, without daring to say so, was tormenting himself with the memory of unavowable presences in his mind, Bruno, seeming not to listen to the rambling old tale which had nothing to do with the anxious man beside him, smilingly related a paradoxical Indian anecdote. It was about a worthy man who went to a hermit and begged him to become his guide. The sannyasin, after scrutinizing him, said:

"My son, can you tell lies?"

"God forbid!" replied the good man. "I could never lie."

"Go and learn then," said the sage. "When you have learnt, you may come back."

For the wisdom of Thibet added, "*inability is not virtue but impotence. . . .*"

"Ah! Good God!" cried Marc. "No one can accuse me of that!"

And the impudent Assia who, in passing, had caught on the wing both the remark and the answer, attested:

"No, on that score there is nothing to reproach him with! . . ."

Both men laughed. But when they were alone again, Marc said to Bruno:

"It is not so much that I have to deal with lying; it is the smallest animal among my fauna; and I suppose you do not think it essential that I should fatten it! I would rather cultivate the six other capital sins. But all the others, and the riffraff of those that are not called capital—they are the worst—the vermin. . . ."

"I will not go so far," said Bruno, stroking his silky beard, "as to repeat the saying of the old wives of your country (those of mine say the same): '*Lice are a sign of good health.*' But as far as the inner life is concerned, true wisdom is, perhaps, as my solitaries teach, not to destroy (destroy nothing!) but to transmute the substance of energies. And those of evil are a fortune, like those of good. He who has received them in his cradle is a mortal blessed by the gods."

"I am then," said Marc. "Curse them! I could have done without their presents."

"Young people are ungrateful," said Bruno.

But the paradoxical sentence went its way, and found good soil in Marc's mind, to be understood and to fructify. He knew very well the vital worth of those energies to him, and that without them he would be weaker, and more helpless. . . . Another of the Thousand-and-One Tales of the "Grand Lama," as the irreverent Assia called Bruno—the question of King Milinda:

"King Milinda asked Nagasena: 'Which of the two is the greater sinner: he who sins in ignorance, or he who sins knowingly?' . . . 'He who sins in ignorance. For of those who take a bar of hot metal in their hands, which

is burned worse: he who knows, or he who does not know? The worse burned is he who does not know.'"

Like a true Frenchman, and Annette's son, he could discern the red hot bar. It was a question of intelligence to know how to take hold of it and use it. Woe to the "poor in spirit!" The kingdom of heaven is promised them. But in heaven's name, for our salvation, let the kingdom of earth be closed to them! "Simplicity (alias silliness) is worse than crime," declared Assia. The wisdom of the Slavs, of India, and of France, all wisdoms, are in agreement: Don't be a fool! . . . The common people are no fools anywhere.

The long combat which Marc had waged with his monsters for years, in silence, without mentioning it to his closest intimates, was made easier by the proximity of his elder, who knew the beasts without need of words, and who stroked their manes and tamed them without whip or spur. The harmony of self with the world (but that is only the beginning!), the harmony of self with self, which Count Bruno had achieved, acted, as by osmosis, upon Marc's tormented nature. It even seemed that the profound and healing meaning of his torments and renouncements was revealed to him, as though they were the ransom agreed upon "to liberate the pure humanity in oneself."

> "Pure humanity redeems
> All the crimes of humanity. . . ."

It was from Bruno's lips that Marc had heard those beautiful lines; through him he came to know the *Iphigenia* of Weimar, a favorite sister to the appeased Orestes of Messina.

Through Bruno Marc was helped to face the problem of violence—the violence inseparable from combat, the violence from which action, even when most stripped of any will to violence, like Gandhi's *Satyagraha*, can never be disentangled (for what else but violence is the refusal of all that coöperation by which we live—a refusal which is like an air-pump producing a stifling vacuum?)—that cruelty which nature inflicts on our every gesture, our every breath, if we would live. Its atmosphere was rendered more breathable to Marc's feverish lungs by his old companion's unexpected acceptance of it and by his serene irony. Bruno, with an undeceived smile, evoked the strange notions of *service and compassion for one's neighbor* which he had gathered among the snow dust, on the high plateaux of Asia. Man's reason, which everywhere is the best soap to wash his hands when they bear traces of mud, traces of blood, had managed to find a place for crime in the compassion preached by those pious solitaries. They had tried to persuade themselves that murder, a mere accident in the course of the murdered man's reincarnations, might act, in certain cases, as a salutary shock and spur him into better ways. So it was a charity, which saved the sinner from sinking deeper into his hell and gave him an opportunity to redeem himself.

Naturally, Marc was revolted: he fulminated against these false priests. Bruno defended them with an indulgence which was worse; for this gave it to be understood (Hail to the ready hearer!) that between these crimes of compassion, and those of extortion which hem the lives of honest men, there was but the difference between a piece of money and its small change. In society, as man has made it, it is very difficult to live without small change—that change of crime which is called justice, and which disposes of the life of the unjust for the safety of the community. (Pious folk have added that

their satisfaction might be complete: "for the salvation of the chastised!")

Bruno did not say that he himself had got out of that society. The "Path" taught by the lamaic directors of conscience goes beyond that first stage of "just or virtuous activity"; its goal is the hostelry whose sign is "activity surmounted." One leaves "action" at the door and one finds within "being"—pure being, like the sun. That was the secret which Bruno never revealed, and from which he drew that reflected light of the summits which comforted other eyes. He was careful not to trust Marc with the key: to a young man the hour has not yet come to taste what lies beyond action! It is a poison until a man has got beyond the line of the parting of the waters, from which he will descend the other slope towards the setting sun. . . . Climb, my friend, climb and act! *Being* is at the end. But first, *do!*

Bruno did not think, like Julien, "What is the good of doing? What is the good of being?"

There are two kinds of humanities (as they say, in France, of magistracies): humanity "seated" and humanity "standing." Julien belonged too much, like his intellectual bureaucratic caste, to that which lives and dies sitting down. And yet he had made heroic efforts to raise his thought! With his thin arms he had projected it into action, like a rock. But though it shook the walls of the old society, it always rebounded and fell upon the man who had thrown it. When he went to bed, he ruminated, overwhelmed:

"God! how heavy humanity is!"

Yes, it is the cross of Golgotha. It was beneath its weight that the Man-God fell, much more than that of the miserable cross of wood. Julien was penetrated by the suffering, the injustice, the demoniacal folly of humanity, past, present, and to come. The man's vast culture was impregnated by the perpetual obsession of man as executioner and victim. And it was terrible to bear it alone. For he was noble enough not to wish to share the weight with another. Annette alone could, with a glance, probe his suffering and ease it. He had not Bruno's too comfortable resource of lightening himself of humanity in the illuminated dream of an oceanic Cosmos. Julien was still attached to the earth, the old field where the flock of men is penned; he shared their destinies. He could liberate himself only by stripping himself of all the illusions by which they live. From the day when the eyes of this former believer had been unsealed he had dug down to the bottom (there is no bottom!) of negation. Now he could not even conceive the idea of Christian immortality, which had cast a spell on half his life. And as he knew those Christian eyes, and their vision, better than anyone, he sensed bitterly the puerile avidity which wears itself out in trying to preserve ephemeral substance and form for all eternity. Nor was he any longer bewitched by the idols of the mind and heart: science, art and love. He saw their limitations too well and their fumes—opium fumes. He had a destructive demon sealed within him, whose fits of lugubrious buffoonery were known to himself alone. But they were restrained by his native goodness, which feared to wound the faith and hope of the weak, and by a famished, unacknowledged craving for the tenderness of which life had deprived him. And, at last, he had that friendship which he had killed more than twenty years ago, and in which he had just discovered the denied meaning of his life—Annette. He saw very well that through that door there were coming back to him, their footsteps muffled, faith and hope and all the illusions which had gone out by

other doors. He knew it well. . . . But he abdicated in full consciousness. He made himself humble in order to have something to believe, love and venerate. Even so, in order to live, does the soul imprisoned behind the bars of reason will that its roots should pass through them, to drink the blood of the earth.

XXXIX

That great silent love which walled itself in did not escape Annette's inner sight. It would have been less appealing if it had spoken. Sunshine emanated from it between the walls. Poor Julien always kept his center of warmth hidden. He let only the light pass through, the spirit which gives light without heat. But that concealed heat penetrated the brick walls against which Annette rested her hands; and she felt the muffled warmth of that old and quivering heart. What tenderness was in him, and what sadness! How completely he was in her power!

In those days, Annette's heart was divided between her two old friends. If she had merely followed her inclination she would have leant towards Bruno. Bruno had more to give her. But she had more to give Julien. And for a woman of her sort, the strongest need is to give.

Certainly it would have been sweet to let herself be lulled by the grand dream, rich in light, the smiling wisdom, the caressing affection of Count Chiarenza. A woman's soul weary of a life of solitary struggles, wounded and bruised, would have found it good to abandon itself to the guidance of that quiet steady companion. But how resist the silent appeal (she alone could hear it) of that other, who had been the friend of her youth, whose virile effort to free himself from the chains of the world in which he had been fast bound, had, without in any way diminishing his intrepid lucidity, left him bereft of happiness! Too disillusioned and too lonely to attain it by his own efforts, too proud and too humble to aspire to it by the help of the only being who was for him the

bearer of hope and joy, he stood beside her in silence, melancholy and grateful that she should be willing to tolerate his presence and grant him even a modest place among her friends. But Annette discerned the stifled entreaty in the depths of his repressed heart; and she was caught by the touching awkwardness of the man's arms which did not dare stretch themselves towards her.

She was troubled by the state of her heart, between these two men, equally dear to her. At their age, it could no longer be a question of love . . . (why?) . . . and the word friendship was an insufficient frame: feeling went beyond it. Yet Annette wished to keep within it. She did not admit her right to go beyond it. She told herself that she was a mother and a grandmother, that the cycle of her life was completed, that she belonged to her family. But she blushed to acknowledge that her life went on its way, and that the cycle was far from closed. The family did not confine her; it constituted an independent cycle in itself. However sincere her children's love for her, they formed a little world apart, without her. She was the beloved guest; but the guest comes and goes. She lacked a home of her own. She forbade herself to think of it. But she could not prevent herself, in hours of weariness, from feeling a longing for it, which she condemned or punished with irony. Would she never learn to grow old? The worst folly, that which the young can pardon least, is keeping a brain of twenty under hair growing gray! . . .

She endeavored to turn that unused dream energy from the heart stream to the mind stream—the mind that acts. She was very audacious in it. She surpassed her two friends in that.

XL

The two men, Julien and Bruno, so brave and lucid, never carried their action to the end. They might be carried away, for an hour, by a flight of imagination which flung them into revolt, into a refusal of despotism or falsehood. And in their inner minds they remained resistant to injustice and to the senselessness of the social state. But, generally, their resistance remained at the threshold of their consciousness, crossing only when forced from its entrenchments. And even then it did not respond to the attack by a counter-attack; it restricted itself to reiterating its indestructible: "No! . . . *Ich kann nicht anders* . . ." They did not strive by every means to impose their "otherwise!" (*"anders"*) upon the world. They belonged to that grand old generation of intellectuals whose activity was poisoned by thought. Even the most generous were inclined to attribute to their thought a privileged position from which too often they never moved. When they had thought, all was said, the world might dance round in a ring; they looked on. The vaster the field of their thought, the more infinitesimal seemed that little ring; it was not worth wasting one's time over. Julien and Bruno, in whom heart balanced intelligence, and who, different from the majority of their great colleagues of the mind, could not succeed in losing interest in the sufferings of the world and its disorderly efforts, might very well be drawn into the ring, for a moment, but they very soon got out of it again. They returned to their own activities. Julien had raised his cry both in and outside the mêlée, and his pitiless sarcasm continued at long in-

tervals to relieve itself by demonstrating the falsity of the theories upon which society rested. But he did not follow the cruel birds of his mind in their flight, and that mind was apter at denouncing and destroying abuses than at reconstructing. Bruno, in whom instinct was stronger, had many times taken part in action for social betterment; and, carried away by his proud old Norman temper and blood, he had hurled defiance at the oppressors. But that also was rather a revenge of the mind against stupidity triumphant. He did not care so much about victory (victory, defeat, are but passing episodes in the long film which is being unwound) as to laugh in the victor's face. His laugh would never have rung so clear as in facing the guns of a firing squad. He was always sorry when he let their violence draw him into violence. He had done so in brief fits of anger, but he blamed himself for it: Julien had not even that much to blame himself for; his fits of anger hurt no one but himself: he repressed them.

For themselves, both deliberately kept apart from violence. With Bruno it was due to a sort of aristocratic disdain. His intelligence tolerated violence—but for others. He was in no hurry to be like them. Violence seemed to both men a crime against liberty of the spirit: they would not be accomplices in it. Thus, they had complacently accepted the doctrine of Tolstoy and Asia, which prescribes non-acceptance without violence. Not that their scrutiny of European men had convinced them of the efficacy of such tactics in every case. But the real combat, for them, being in the field of spirit, the main point, to them, was that the spirit should be saved. . . . *"Salvavi animam meam. . . ."*

It was long since that had been enough for Marc! Even the salvation of the souls of others no longer sufficed if their bodies were not also saved. The miserable body, that rag, that life of a day, so lightly spoken of by those "idealists" who are not forced to worry about it (for they are not so badly provided for!). . . . No! the body first! And let us call it by its name, its name of glory and scorn: the belly. . . . Despise it, beautiful souls! . . . The famished belly, the belly which makes life, the belly from which the tree of Jesse springs—the root. . . . Nourish it! . . . First conquer hunger, poverty, social misery. . . . The soul will flower, if it pleases, at the top of the tree. Rake the earth at the foot of the tree and manure it. . . . It is from that manure that God, or Man-God will be born. Neither Julien nor Bruno would have contradicted it. Bruno knew the hard saying of the tender Francis of Assisi of India:[1] "No religion for empty bellies!" In fact he had made his life conform to it, for he had despoiled himself of nearly all he possessed to fill them.

But his part in social action stopped there. Bruno did not pretend to oblige others to do the same. And if his judgment was clear enough to see that the system of capitalist compression must necessarily lead to explosion, he did nothing to hasten or retard it. He saw the bloodshed too clearly, and did not want to dip his beautiful hands in it. (They had been obliged to search the ruins of the wrecked town and the remains of rotting flesh. The dreadful stench still clung to his finger tips. . . .) He knew, moreover, that he could prevent nothing! Social fatality is as blind and ineluctable as an earthquake. . . . This too clear realization of what is fated, this too much knowledge, weighs upon the action of intellectuals, even the freest and bravest. They are like spectators who have

[1] Ramakrishna.

read beforehand the play being acted; it is played without them, the actors have only reached the crisis, when they have got to the end.

Marc was still at the crisis, and the spirit of the action engrossed him more than the result. He preferred Assia's hands that did not fear to dirty their nails with action, to Bruno's too white hands. All he wanted of his elders was to learn whether he was on the right road—the royal road of great Destiny. And that was exactly what they could tell him; and they did tell him: "*Via Sacra*. . . ." The great highway, straight and direct, of the legions. It leads to the goal, by combat. And both men, Julien and Bruno, were in agreement not to lessen the strength of soul and legs of the young combatant. It was his path. It was his law.

Marc's law led him out of his clan. Could he be said to belong to a clan? He did belong to one! He was a Westerner, he loved his France, his France north of the Loire, with its pale blue rather ashen sky, its earth, fair and rosy like the flesh of its daughters, its horizons, woods and hills, its rivers with their nightingales, its clear speech, and its smile of the *fabliaux*. In other days, he would have been happy (so he thought), like the rivers of France in their beds. But those rivers, the nearest, those in which he recognized his water and current—Annette, Ruche—had themselves left their beds . . . *per non dormire*. . . . One slept too well in those valleys, where the fishermen grew hypnotized over their floats. . . .

And, despite himself, he also belonged to the intellectual caste, he had their mental needs, their mania for logic, their inordinate pride, a hundred times swallowed in vain. But all his experiences of the last few years had proved to him that they could not be depended upon! It was not so much a question of intelligence as of ability to act. There

were many among them who saw the situation as clearly as he did. They even saw what ought to be done. But as to doing it, they would not have raised the tip of a finger. Some, because the knowing and cowardly prudence of these good French officials mistrusted everything which might trouble their rest, their sleepy course (their jog-trot) towards honors and salaries: those who had reached the top had no further interest in moving. Others, because more or less consciously they were afraid of upheavals: their respectable bourgeois habits might, at a push, have admitted an order different from that in which they dwelt, but they could not bear the idea of removal, which would upset their furniture and papers. Revolution was pleasing only a hundred years afterward, when one had settled down again. Yet how could one avoid moving when one knew that the old shanty was condemned? For many of them did know it. But they said to themselves, in order to push aside the painful picture of the inevitable invasion of their retreat by the heavy feet and clumsy hands of the furniture movers:

"Bah! it will last our time! . . ."

The everlasting timid refrain, even in the parties which were theoretically preparing the Revolution, the Socialists and the bourgeois reformers . . .

"To-morrow! to-morrow! You will make the Revolution to-morrow, when we, your elders, are no more. . . ."

And was it not the last blow, a fresh proof of the congenital impotence of the intellectuals, that these two elders, Julien and Bruno, whose independence, disinterestedness, and absolute scorn of danger Marc loved and respected, did nothing, would do nothing to mix themselves in the necessary action! Nothing but think! Sometimes speak. Write, if need be, if their opinion was asked. Then they expressed it clearly enough. But they

would take good care not to impose it—even when it was a question of saving the very people whom they would have had to compel. Social action was heavy with chains which they no more cared to bear themselves than to impose on others. These free spirits had forgotten the primary essentials of successful agriculture. To make the wheat grow, the ground must first be cleared, freed from stones, the thickets burned, and after that one must press heavily on the plowshare and drive the furrow straight and long and deep. The "august gesture of the sower" . . . is not enough. We must use force, we must force the resisting earth, force the oxen straining under the yoke, force our muscles, force our hearts.

XLI

Marc began by sifting the fine sayings of his elders, but only of those whose lives forced from him an esteem certain of never being deceived.

The first rule: no longer to take into account the great principles, the "categorical imperatives" good for all time and in all places, the abstract, august, undisputed eternal truths. They apply to everything. They apply to nothing. In a perpetually changing world, a truth which never changes is a lie, or worse: to worthy folk incapable of discerning the lie, it is *nothing*.

The real is true; and the first law of honesty is to observe the real exactly, and deduce from it its clear, virile concrete rules both of judging and of acting—not the one without the other. And not to-morrow, or at all times—but at this time and immediately—here, on this ground, on which one of my feet rests solidly and the other, raised in walking, is about to find a fresh point of support.

"I see the ground. I see the to-day of humanity, this real world of exploitation and carnage, delivered over to the great birds of prey by the fattening ruminants of the bourgeoisie who pasture on its old field, which is becoming exhausted. I see it delivered up by the circus animals of intelligence and by the mangy-necked dogs of the press. I see the despoiling of the world—so overwhelming and beyond measure, in the subjection of the war years and the disorganization which followed, that the unworthy *conquistadores* (hardly one of whom rises beyond the level of ill-bred mediocrity) have fallen short in their victory, and have been unable to organize the division of the spoils. In a few years, they have succeeded only in up-

setting the economy of the world, the compass of which has gone crazy, and accumulating mountains of gold and riches of a useless nature—worse than useless, devastating—on the two ruined continents. I see war, wars in preparation or in progress, everywhere, under cover of the sinister buffoonery of Geneva: the League of Nations. I see, under the shameful farce of Disarmament, the monstrous increase of war budgets, even in nations which have been bled white, which do not devote a tenth of their remaining resources to the upkeep of their own house—public works, bread for the unemployed, education. Everything by which men live, all the blood of others, flows to destruction: everything to the guns! . . . I see destruction of vital values everywhere—wheat burned in countries where millions of beings are dying of hunger . . ." (And this thought, which threw Marc into a state of exasperated revolt, scarcely ruffles the bewildered indifference of thousands of worthy people too selfish and unfeeling to react against what does not graze their precious skins.) "Everywhere I see Fascism used, or held in reserve, to protect the unjust order. I see the dreadful immorality of the state of the world, which is equaled only by its criminal insanity.

"And that state does not depend upon individuals, upon groups, upon Fascisms of the fist or finance which it would be relatively easy to strangle. It is indissolubly bound up with the whole capitalist order of the degenerate bourgeoisie. Incrusted in it, like vermin in a fleece, are not only the crimes of the present, but the crimes of tomorrow, each necessitating the other. The directors, the profiteers, are at the same time the dependents of their system; the slavers are slaves; they can no longer free their necks from the pillory of business. Everything is business, it's all that holds them; and all they hold be-

comes crime. For when business is bad, there is no way out for the lords and servants of business except to destroy the values of life and the productive forces which are in their way, and to constrain the human instruments of the proletarian masses by Fascism and wars! Wars—war; of all business the most enormous and the most juicy, juicy with gold, juicy with blood, for the magnates, manufacturers, and traffickers of the metallurgic and chemical industries, for the monopolies and trusts of wheat and of cotton and of accumulated stocks of merchandise; and it is juicy with dividends and coupons for the bourgeoisie and their 'shares' (the only thing in which they glory, these sons of those great bourgeois of '89!). The rest of the juice goes down the throats of the starvelings, the quill-drivers and venal thinkers, ever on sale to those who can pay! . . .

"'*War, Commerce and Piracy*
Are three in one, consubstantial.'[1]

"The name of the Trinity is Capitalism. No other alternative than to destroy it, or accept! The pacifism of Geneva is a traitor to *real peace*. Its true object and its effect is to benumb the inert nations, so as to deliver them up. *Real peace* demands that the masters of war be eliminated. They will be so only after the assault upon their Bastilles. Those of Russia have already fallen. When will it be the turn of ours? Are we ready?

"All over the world the working class masses, better informed than the rest of the people, threaten and agitate; but their menace is still unorganized. Too many elements of disunion, which their enemies know how to capitalize,

[1] "*Krieg, Handel und Piraterie*
Dreieinig sind sie, nicht zu trennen."
(Goethe: *Faust.*)

are used to neutralize their energies: there is mortal enmity between parties which boast the same socialist principles, and like disputers over the Talmud they insultingly fight with each other over their commentaries on texts and divergences in tactics; the artful, suspicious, short-sighted leaders foment these divisions, which allow them to carry on their advantageous rôle of undertakers of the Revolution with no risk of bringing it about during their lifetime. The proletarian masses themselves are easily won over by the masters of the capitalist factory of death and oppression: it is only a question, in times of unemployment, when millions of workers throughout Europe are dismissed, of opening to them new factories for engines of war and for industrial and chemical products of dual usefulness. The most revolutionary workers rush into them, and by a savage irony assist in forging the death which will sweep away their brothers of other nations, or which will rebound upon themselves with the poisoned breath of the engines which the manufacturers sell, without scruple, to hostile nations. And the bourgeoisie, aware of these highly treasonable markets, hardly show any indignation. When these sales bring millions in gold into the coffers, no one cares about the millions in blood which they draw out; and the iron-masters with German names who preside over French destinies, the undertakers of the world's assassination, have become a French glory! . . . Let no one dare touch them! The workers, instead of strangling them, accept from these honored apaches' hands, bread kneaded with the blood of others. They say:

"'What do you expect? We must eat. We are not heroes! . . .'

"'We are not heroes?' So be it! Neither you nor I. But we can become so, when we will—when we must! And we must. The choice now lies between two deaths—

either to die soiled and enslaved, or to die free and avenged. To die that the men of to-morrow may live, delivered! . . . Such is the example set by the Revolutionary phalanxes sacrificed in the combats of the U.S.S.R. And since, in our West, neither the bourgeois classes nor the illustrious intellectuals of yesterday can be depended upon to follow that example, let us appeal to those of to-morrow, who will not offer their privileges of intellect as an excuse to escape the responsibility and risk of action—appeal to those who will not deny their brotherhood with the proletarian worker! Like the Third, in '89, the Fourth Estate, which was nothing, would then be everything. And it will be. Nothing is possible without the organized energies of the working classes. Upon their shoulders, and upon their heads—intelligence and strength—their will to devote themselves, depend the life and fate of the world. And first, let these millions of breasts learn to cry, with unanimous, implacable decision, the 'No!' that will break the order of death, and hamstring the murderous powers. Let strike and revolt answer the threats of imperialist wars! Strike in the forges. Strike in factories. Strike in transport. Labor shakes the burden from its shoulders and says:

"'No! You who claim to command me, now try to act without me! You could not even exist without me. Like the species of exploiting ants, you can eat only what Labor has disgorged for you. Capitulate! Go back into the ranks! And reconquer, by work, the right to eat! . . .'

"There is only one sacred cause to-day. The cause of Labor, alone. All the rest, faith and culture, pure reason, social state—all must be rebuilt, from the beginning, upon the unshakable foundations of organized Labor. But such organization in the thick of battle calls for the strength of Hercules. . . . One is not Hercules, far from it!"

thought Marc, glancing with pity at his thin arms. "But I will do what I can. I will give all I have—my life—and more than that—my death, if necessary—all my powers of devotion. If only there were a thousand of us—no more—in the world, who would do as much, that nucleus would be enough to make the formless mass agglutinate itself with us; and we would become the moving mountain. . . ."

XLII

Thus Marc had made his decision: to consecrate himself to the great cause, to prepare himself for the coming social struggle by gathering together all his own forces to serve it, and by contributing, from that moment, to its organization.

This was, in fact, the most difficult part. For a young intellectual like himself had some trouble in finding his proper place in the boundaries of the world of labor, in which he had not taken root, and among mediocre politicians whose vociferous demagogy, which had lost the art of speaking, listened to nothing but its own din and did not trouble to reason. The Western proletariat in its formation had missed having the harsh discipline of a Revolutionary party which, like that of Russia, had gone through half a century of proscriptions, of hangings, of bloody attempts a hundred times foiled and a hundred times renewed, and of meditation in exile. The Commune of Paris was only a brazier. It devoured everything pell-mell, and left nothing but its red stain on the clouds, and its smoke. The French workers had no experience, as yet, of the social combats in which they were about to engage. No doubt they could acquire it only at the price of more than one disaster, as had Revolutionary Russia before 1905. With this essential difference: that the U.S.S.R. now existed as an example and support. They must learn from the strategists of Moscow, but with knowledge of the resources proper to the country, its mental needs, and the tenacious attempts of its old Revolutionary parties—from its wounded in campaigns of the past, and from its young syndicates. Marc, henceforth, applied himself to the task.

He was still only a pupil. But he tried to make up for lost time. He must be ready for the day when the forces of action would be reckoned up.

Julien and Bruno looked on. They read his intentions. And they did nothing to dissuade him. They could understand and approve such intentions, in a young man craving as he did action without compromise. But they had no wish to imitate him. Like others of that generation of most sincere intellectuals Julien and Bruno saw too far ahead to see well close at hand. One, whoever the actors might be, could see the climax with blinded eyes, the bleeding Œdipus of the tragedy. The other saw the play: tragic or comic mask, and under it the same face of the panther-eyed Dionysos, of the Dream of Life, crowned with pampas. Though they might be caught in the play for a moment, they preferred to sit and look on. Marc vexed himself in vain trying to make them rise from their seats. He broke himself against the eyes that affectionately approved him, but to which he was only a living spectacle. If only he had had to strive against them! But not at all. They seemed to say:

"Go on, my boy! You are on the right road. Go forward on your way!"

But they stood aside from the way. They furnished him with arguments that he should act according to his own law and not according to theirs. They even helped him to solve in his own fashion, and not theirs, the problems that puzzled him, such as that of violence. To the young man, there seemed a kind of irritating indulgence in this way of approving and being unwilling to accompany him.

He said to Bruno with vexation:

"I can't tolerate your disdain for what I am doing or want to do."

"I feel no disdain, my dear boy. I say: Bravo!"

"Why not: Encore? You say it as though you were speaking to a circus acrobat who had just done his turn."

Bruno laughed, and said:

"I have done mine, my friend."

Marc, taken aback, seized his hand:

"That's true. I beg your pardon! You have had a heavy task. But if mine is just, if you approve it, why not take your share in it?"

Bruno said:

"I am in the reserve now and you are on active service. Each in his turn!"

"The combat," said Marc, "has need of every fighter."

"Your fight," said Bruno, "is only an episode in the great battle. You take in only a part of the field. Don't bother about the rest of the army. Every corps has received its orders. Carry out yours. Forward!"

"And where is the chief?" asked Marc.

"The chief is ahead," said Bruno, "as at the bridge of Arcola. Catch up with him!"

"And you leave us on the tottering bridge, and do not follow us?"

"Who knows?" said Bruno, with his subtle smile. "Perhaps you will find us on the other bank!"

XLIII

Yes, that was the mystery: that while refusing to take part in the active campaigns, Bruno, like Julien, never stuck behind with the baggage wagons of the army. These two men, so different, the Democritus and Heraclitus of legend, had this in common that, having escaped by opposite ways from the enclosure of action which surrounds and defends the City of Man, both were to be found on guard in the forward marches, wherever the most dangerous battles were in progress. And from their by no means sheltered observation posts under the cross fires of both camps they never grew weary of studying beings in action. Their exact and well-informed curiosity could determine the slope, and their minds prepared in advance the bed of the current. For such is the nature of the Western soul. Though it may have found the door of escape into dream, or into nothingness—though it doubts everything, even its reasons for action—whether it believes or disbelieves—it marches on; it marches on. . . . *"E pur si muove . . ."* It does not allow itself the too easy resource of immobility, in melancholy or in the voluptuousness of doubt or faith. Bestriding its *"Que sais-je?"* as well as its *Credo*—like Rosinante and Sancho's donkey—the Western soul journeys on indefatigably. And that untiring march is part of the course of worlds in the eternal horology. To go on, whether one wishes it or not, is to have faith. And such a faith is equal to that of prayer! Prayer is the path that leads to Being. But going on is the path made by the feet of Being. Only when in motion does Being chart a trajectory on the black-board of darkness.

And it was by this invincible faith in life and motion that Bruno and Julien, without belonging, or wishing to belong to any party, had necessarily to coöperate with Marc's party. The two men were experts in reading, as by the Röntgen rays, in the vast body of humanity, where life lay, and where death. And their infallible sense made its choice: where life lay, there was their country. They found it in all those—individuals or nations—who in the tragic *"Die and become!"* of the old world were taking part in the great Mutation—pioneers of new sciences, new morals, new societies—all those who were breaking the belt of prejudices and abuses (or letting it out a notch or two, as Bruno said ironically).

The child grows, he needs a larger size. The child-world of the century of wars and universal revolutions was bursting all the hooks and eyes, all the sheaths, gods, laws and frontiers which had hitherto fitted his limbs. In rising, had he not burst the ceiling of the old solar Universe with his forehead, passed his head through the myriads of the Milky Way, and swept with his eye a whole armful of other universes, the fiery tresses, the drops of sperm of the great Spiral Nebulæ, like jellyfish at the bottom of the sea? How could the spirit be dismayed by the tottering of society, the blows of the battering ram which all the world over sapped the standards of the ancient cities? Even this bourgeois who had been fed on the traditions of classic Catholic France, even this nobleman of Sicily whose beard was perfumed with Græco-Latin culture, did not seek the past in the future, but rather in the past the new-born future, the young Hercules who strangled serpents even in his cradle. They did not look askance at the adult Hercules who was cleansing the Steppes of Scythia with his club. They were curious as to the Labors of the Russian Revolution, and

followed them with a sympathy which did not exclude criticism; but it was that of aged friends, who regretted that they could not take their part in the suffering, and even in the youthful errors, engendered by a new Truth, a new Life. And sensing their regret, Marc felt the joy of being young and able to enter that Promised Land while they must remain on the threshold. It was a new feeling to him. Hitherto, he had not greatly appreciated his good fortune: the Promised Land and youth had seemed to him a land accursed. When one of his elders praised it to him, when they said, "You are lucky to be twenty!" he had felt like slapping their faces; he thought it was a horrible joke . . . Or what sort of idiots were they? . . . But these two men, who had so lavishly paid their share of sorrows to life—they regretted that they had nothing more to give! They had a right to speak! And he had none to sulk before the table, at the beginning of the meal.

His Assia did not sulk before it, but she could not have said why; her sound teeth could have chewed anything, good or bad; her hunger for life and action cared nothing for reasons. But Marc was very glad that they were offered him: for intelligence with him was a motor as strong as instinct, and that motor must be fed. However great his craving for action, however ready he might be to hold his life cheaply, what strength it gave to action and what joy to be able to persuade himself that this world, this world of the present time, which would perhaps take his life, was worth the gift, was worthy of the sacrifice! That was what Bruno, as if in response to his secret desire, gave him, without appearing to do so, when he talked with Julien of the great Epoch. "Which?" "Ours, of course! That in which we suffer, that which makes and unmakes us and which we make, which we build, humble

masons of the gigantic plan. In the confusion of the workyard, and the wearing out of millions of sacrificed workers' lives, as in the days of the Pharaohs, we do not see the pyramid arising—the prodigies of the spirit that surround us, the miraculous discoveries and conquests of science, the flaring up again of the religious and revolutionary soul, the resurrection of ancient races laid in the grave, of India and of China, and the great leaders, who incarnate in their consciousness heroic peoples: the Sun Yat-Sens, the Gandhis and the Lenins."

From his intercourse with his two friends, Marc drew a deep satisfaction, a tranquillity as to his foundations. Bruno communicated to him, by osmosis, his intuition (which Marc had no time to verify by experience) of Being in motion, and he inspired him with his confidence in the march of the world towards unity, through unceasing conflict. Marc had the feeling that there existed, behind the curtain of chaos, an eternal harmony, a far-off music of the spheres, where the antinomies were resolved. He perceived it in lightning flashes. It was enough to prevent him from ever being submerged in the darkness again, whatever might befall. The army could hurl itself into the battle. Its rear was assured.

XLIV

But its van? But the forefront of the battle? It was clear that Marc had no time to resolve all his antagonisms of mind in the fight. Action has no time to wait. Action catches. Once caught, it is impossible to free oneself! Nothing of oneself can be reserved! Each movement requires thought. Action demands all the forces of the mind when one is face to face with the enemy. He who lets a particle be distracted risks death, risks much more, risks the ruin of his party and his cause . . . Hasten, therefore, to think before the trumpet sounds the charge! *"Es muss sein . . ."* That which must come, must come. And it can come only by means of our arms. The *"It must be"* is *"I must be."* We are Destiny!

Now, Destiny cannot be fulfilled to-day (he who thinks, cannot possibly avoid knowing this) save by the unchaining of elementary forces, a wave out of the depths, a tidal wave that sweeps everything away. Marc was not able to remain unaware; he foresaw, he saw as if he were already engaged in them, the ferocity of the social struggles which were preparing, which were already going on in a part of Europe; he saw the fearful menace of Asiatic nationalism, drunk with vengeance, out of control, its fist raised above Europe. His burning hand already touched the fist, the claw, the terrible era which the world was going to enter when the flood-gate of the Revolution was opened. How decide upon it without anguish? Bruno contemplated these cyclones with serenity, because he saw in them a phase of the Necessity which leads the world, and which his spirit was content with contemplating. But Marc had taken upon himself the full responsibility of

all that Destiny from the moment that he decided to enter it. And come what might, he had not left himself the right to evade it. A hermit's life would be cowardice.

In order to break the old system of social injustice, he now was resolved to serve in the army of the oppressed in any post assigned to him in the line of battle. The new injustices and sufferings which the combat must needs cause, he knew to be inevitable—therefore necessary; it was therefore necessary that he should participate in them; he had no right to wash his hands of them and say to others:

"Dirty your hands! I have nothing to do with it."

Better to take their crimes upon himself than to repeat Pilate's gesture! He must accept his share in the sufferings, not only endured, but caused. And this was intolerable to him. He did not speak of it to anyone, even those dearest to him. It was useless. No one could decide for him, nor turn aside the weight of his destiny. He accepted it. He made no further attempt to dispute the order. He saw, with a heart shrinking but resolved, the hour of action approaching, heavy with all its overwhelming necessities. But in his heart, he addressed to that destiny—that dark power which drags us on like the rotation of a world in the darkness—a passionate supplication:

That in serving it, at his post in the battle, he might be called upon to shed no blood but his own; that he might not add to the pinnacle of suffering that rises higher from age to age; that his own suffering might be offered as ransom!

He knew too well, hiding his secret fear from himself, that once caught by violence he would sink into it like a ghost-ridden Macbeth.

XLV

A sudden brutal incident gave him a taste of that delirium.

His name had definitely emerged from obscurity. He could no longer be ignored. The manifest support of Julien Davy, whose moral (and still more, academic!) authority was established in the learned world—the support of the Leagues of which Julien and Bruno were members—forced the public to listen to him. And the experience of the young combatant, precociously ripened by that communicated to him by his great elders, directed his blows to the exact spots where the capitalist Colossus was vulnerable: straight at the irresponsible pirates of industrial finance who forced the hands of governments, and held the levers of command—at the men of the forges and cannons—straight at the trusts that captured the press and enslaved opinion! From the moment when the attack was no longer dissipated in vague theorizing, but was aimed at the heads of the real enemies, at groups, at individuals who were mentioned by name, men like Marc Rivière became a "public menace," and were at once in danger.

The implacability of their attacks attracted dangerous allies in the very ranks of those who slaved in the galleys of the proconsuls of the blast furnaces—the malcontents, the rebels, workmen, engineers, who came to reveal the secrets of shameful bargains, the criminal delivery of engines of murder to foreign powers, friends, or enemies of to-day or to-morrow. ("What does it matter so long as they pay!") Sometimes the informers were opposed to Marc's views, nationalists, patriots, whose in-

dignation at the rascally internationalism of the sharks of industrial trusts made them hand over the treasonable documents to Marc—but among these rebels *provocateurs* might creep in who would betray both sides. The ground was burning under foot, and all the risks were deadly. The proconsuls, attacked and undermined, began to take the first steps. They could have no further illusion as to the possibility of conquering the adversary by the usual means of trickery, money, flattery or profits. Some day or other he would have to be eliminated. And there was no lack of means. The most discreet were the best. But none was excluded. There were renewed terms of imprisonment, by which martyrs might be buried, for some imprudent speech, promoted to treason against the country. There was the trap of riots got up by the police, into which it could be arranged for clumsy agitators to fall. There was also, if necessary, the foul blow, the stray bullet, the leaded cane, at meetings, or at their door, or even (good gracious, an accident can so easily happen! . . .) on a solitary walk in some lonely place. It was not necessary that the "accident" should take place on reserved shooting ground, on French soil: the unfortunate mischance might happen, here or there, in any country: fatality knows no frontiers, especially when one knows how to direct it. As Internationals were all the fashion, the rebels should not have them all; the forces of order, the stranglers, would have theirs too! Even if they could not agree among themselves, they would agree against the common enemy. Men of honor did not refuse to do each other these little services; one good turn deserved another. Under such conditions the chase was not a very fatiguing pleasure. One had only to sit down on the watch, and wait for someone else to bring down the quarry. From that moment, Marc Rivière was

marked. They were in no hurry, they kept an eye on him. There was nothing to lose by waiting! . . .

Neither he nor those around him were sufficiently aware of the danger. They knew the danger existed. But they did not see that it was near and inevitable; it was a vague cloud on the horizon; there would be time to safeguard him! The moral nobility of Julien and Count Chiarenza obscured their sight, though they were forewarned. And as to Assia, her ardor in the game, and the excitement of action, made her a little too oblivious of the risks run by her partner. Annette, haunted by Timon's end, was the only one who felt anxiety; but it was confused and intermittent. She did not venture to speak of it, knowing that they would take no notice and would jeer at her pusillanimity. Moreover, Marc and Assia left her very incompletely informed as to the dangerous steps their campaign compelled them to take; she was only obscurely aware of the danger; and she was more preoccupied by Marc's health, of which he took no care, and which was exhausted by fatigue and passions, than by dangers from without; she would have liked to tear him away from his feverish activities and force him to take a few months' rest. But neither he nor Assia would hear of it.

And so the cloud continued to grow heavier until an accidental discharge disclosed the extreme tension of the atmosphere and gave Annette unexpected assistance in taking Marc away, at least for a limited time.

Marc and Assia participated in the international campaign organized annually by the *Secours Rouge International,* around the anniversary of the Paris Commune on March eighteenth. To this celebration had been joined a demonstration of proletarian solidarity in behalf of all revolutionary political prisoners throughout the world;

and they were endeavoring to mobilize public opinion in defense of colonial peoples oppressed by the imperialism of great states. In those years, in every part of the world, in Indo-China, China, Syria and Egypt, in Morocco, in the Malay Archipelago and the Congo, in Samoa, in Nicaragua, in South America and Cuba, rebellion flared up, was savagely repressed, but still blazed up again from the embers, and threatened to carry the flame at a bound over oceans and deserts, like a forest fire. More than once Marc had denounced the preponderating part played by the great industrial combines in the wars of colonial conquest, and he had published documents upon the secret supplies of arms and ammunition sent by the masters of remunerative death to the butchers of the Far East, for their ferocious repressions and rapacious military expeditions. Of course he was denounced in his turn as an enemy of Europe and a traitor to civilization. There were plenty of violent and sincere people, worked upon and excited by the masters of the forges through their liberally bribed press, who demanded his arrest. Failing governmental authority, whose weakness they insulted, they declared that they themselves would close the traitor's mouth with their fists. But the tone of wordy warfare had long since become so ugly and shrill that no importance was attached to the Homeric threats of apaches of the King or the Republic.

But in these last weeks, which heralded the new season, the barometer showed a change of weather in the air. And that evening of March 18, from the moment they arrived at the meeting at which Marc was to speak, his friends felt the approaching storm. Julien Davy and Assia were on the platform with Marc (Annette and Bruno had stayed at home; they did not like these meetings). There was unusual excitement in the hall before

the meeting opened. Bitter discussions were going on. Excited or suspicious figures crept into the front row, or kept on the outskirts of the meeting, seeming to obey signals of attack or groupings.

The arrival of Marc and Julien was greeted with hostile cries, against which the rest of the audience reacted. Their supporters were the more numerous, but they were unorganized. Yet the tumult suddenly ceased, as by the order of the conductor of an orchestra. Assia's sharp eyes saw, and she understood that they were reserving themselves to attack better at the stroke of the baton. She was herself known and marked; she caught passing looks of hate taking her measure; she sustained them boldly, and defied them.

Julien's speech was received with a few insults, quickly repressed; the very coolness of his delivery disarmed them; and his official position as a great University man and notable savant commanded respect; moreover in his case they were aiming only at the pacifist, the "Boche," and that was now another story, a dish grown cold! But as soon as Marc stood up the hurricane was let loose. Hisses and hoots, to which were added the opposing yells of his partisans. Marc waited for an interval of silence; but as soon as he opened his mouth the tumult broke out again with redoubled violence. They were clearly determined to prevent his speaking. He shouted. And the shrill notes of his voice broke through the pauses in the din. He was enraged, and losing his self-control in his impatience, he became insulting in his turn. Certain words, harsh and cutting, landed here and there like blows on the faces aimed at. The lashed faces became furious. People stood up shaking their fists. And suddenly there was a rush! . . . Like a ground-swell, pushing the crowd, breaking through counter rushes, a band sprang to the

assault of the platform. They were young gentlemen of the *Action Française*, or some of Coty's gangs who had been worked up to a white heat, and were cheered on by the brutal throats of paid inciters who had to give their money's worth. From the platform Assia watched them coming; she was in front of Marc whom a group of friends were trying to defend; and she could not stop herself from hurling at those below provocative epithets, accentuated by too expressive mimicry: pushing out her lips, she made a show, in Russian fashion, of spitting on them.

The human wave bounded forward. Pushed, carried forward by the ranks pressing behind them, five or six of the most violent leapt on to the platform; and the most agile was a young man of Marc's age, strangely resembling him: he was thin, and had the same refined intellectual face, but his eyes were starting out of his head; he was mad with hate and fury, as if crazed by alcohol. He shouted with his stick raised, and, rushing on Assia, aimed it full at her face. She would have been felled to the ground, if Marc, leaping over the table like a wild-cat, had not flown at the assailant's throat. The blow was diverted and only the end of the stick struck her cheek and cut it. But the young tiger was carried away by his leap; with his nails digging into the assailant's throat, they rolled off the platform together. The shock of the fall was terrible for the under man. The back of his head had struck the flooring. And on the top of him was this madman, crazy in his turn, who would not loosen his deadly claws. A mist of blood suffused Marc's eyes, his brain and his spirit bathed in blood. He wanted blood. His jaws chattered. He would have torn the enemy with his teeth. And he did not see that the man under him had lost consciousness. They had trouble in

dragging Marc from the inert body that he was crushing. Only then did he see the livid face that resembled him. And he stood still, gaping at it. But it was only for an instant. The fighting frenzy still raged within him; and the mêlée around him was savage. With head bent as if to spring again, his pitiless glance followed the broken man who was being carried out, and he thought:

"I'd like to kill him a second time!"

Julien had come down and stood beside him, trying to appease him, and Assia was there with her cheek bleeding and swollen. He could not hear what they were saying. And suddenly all was dark; the electricity was switched off; the hall became a barking maw of darkness rent by three or four revolver shots. Firm hands gripped both his arms; and Marc blindly let himself be dragged out of the hall, with Assia laughing nervously in his ears. Before he had time to collect himself, he was outside, surrounded by a group of his partisans, and bundled into a taxi with Julien and Assia. . . .

Then came the nervous reaction; a convulsive shudder shook him. Julien held his hands and spoke to him; though painfully shocked by the fit of murderous madness which had come over his young friend he tried, in order to free the boy from it as soon as possible, not to show any surprise; he spoke calmly and cordially, making no allusion to the recent scene. But Assia rubbed her bleeding cheek against Marc's pale face. When they got home, and were in their room, he shuddered when he saw that blood on his face and the gleam of triumph in Assia's eyes; she was chattering and excited. Assia was thinking only of the fray, and the danger they had been through together. But he ascribed it to the joy of a victory which she had gained over him. He had been what she wanted, and what he did not want to be. Action had got the

better of thought. He had been—he always would be—despite his inner resolves, his sworn vow, his own will, swept away by a flood of violence; and he knew that at any moment, to-day, to-morrow, this frenzy might be, would be—as it had just been—uncontrollable. His hands, his heart, his thoughts were no longer his own; they belonged to savage forces which disposed, and would dispose, of them. Prostrate, vanquished, but unable to bear his defeat, he now lay in his bed and Assia clasped him: but, lying motionless in her arms, he was like the fallen body of the young enemy he had broken, and he saw once more the livid face with its strange resemblance to his own; and he said to himself:

"I have killed myself!"

And once more that night, under Assia's ardent kisses, feverish as she, but with his soul far away, he besought his destiny to save him from *that* which he saw approaching. While Assia, releasing the body from which the spirit was absent, fell at last into a heavy sleep shaken by sudden starts, Marc, solitary in the narrow bed, in which they touched each other from icy feet to burning thighs, prayed, prayed desperately, that in the battles to come it might be his fate to be sacrificed, without sacrificing the life of others—in order to lessen the sufferings of men and to defend the oppressed.

XLVI

He had now a sudden hallucination that this heartfelt prayer, heard by no ear, had yet been recorded. The contract was concluded! . . . His heart sank. But courageously he accepted it. If he had been given to devotional practices, he would have said: "Amen!"

He was too free from superstition, and too eager in his self-criticism, to believe in a Destiny, an unknowable Power, with whom one could converse. His intellect disdainfully rejected that illusion. But the human machine does not respond to the lever of reason alone. Marc had long since acquired the habit (and in these last years the habit had developed under trial) of those inward plunges, in which one is brought face to face with the invisible forces which govern life. And life in its turn commands those forces, and dictates the answer it expects from them, and directs them towards the path along which they will eventually drag it. Question and answer come from the same being: he shapes his own destiny. Destiny comes to those who go to meet it. No one saw—except, perhaps, Bruno—the destiny towards which the young somnambulist was journeying. Annette knew it only after the event; then she realized that she had known it before. Over her large eyes, that were like reservoirs, there passed, unperceived by other eyes, many reflections which her consciousness refused to report to her.

But she was anxious about Marc's state, in the days after the disturbance. He was absent-minded, worried, and harassed. The tragic hand-to-hand struggle of that evening, from which his adversary had never risen, did

not have the judicial consequences for Marc which might have been feared; for evidence established the fact that the victim had been the aggressor and that the fatal lesion was due to the unfortunate accident of a fall. Assia's wounded face bore proof of the brutality of the attack, which excused that of the defense. And the prosecution was abandoned. But Marc did not abandon the case which he brought against himself in his heart: for he alone knew full well the will to murder that had filled that heart. Though he spoke of it to no one, he had inwardly pronounced sentence against himself. He was weary of himself and of all he did. He had lost all taste for work. He took no interest in the furious attacks upon him in the hostile newspapers. Assia herself had to agree with Annette that their boy ought to be taken away from Paris and his surroundings for a few weeks, and that a journey would be the best cure for the cares by which he was besieged.

Circumstances lent themselves to the execution of this plan. Quite a round little sum of money came unexpectedly to Marc for the scenario of a film which he had revised. And Assia declared that this money must be spent:

"It is immoral to capitalize money!" said the artful joker. "My principles will not permit it. But they authorize me to eat it up, if I—if you—if we have earned it. Eating is good and useful to the community."

"I have not much appetite," said Marc. "But if you have, feast, my girl! Perhaps I shall grow hungry when I see you eating. Choose your menu! It is all the same to me, so long as we eat out of the same plate."

Assia needed no second bidding. She decreed that they would leave Paris for three months. For seven or eight years she had been parched to death on its dry

pavements; she wanted water, water running down from snows and rocks, virgin water, as yet unsoiled by humanity.

"And you want to bring it our fevers and impurities?" said Marc.

"No! I will kneel down before it," said Assia. "I will ask its pardon as I dip my finger in it to make the sign of the cross on my lips and forehead."

She chose the Alps. Hotel life? "No. A little house which we will take for the season, the three of us."

"The three? Ourselves and the child?"

"The child isn't one, he's the centime to the franc. The three are you, me and our Annette."

Marc was grateful that Assia should think of taking his mother. From that moment he made no further objection to the journey. Assia remarked it and told Annette, who needed pressing, that she was indispensable: Marc could not do without her, he was more in love with his mother than with his wife.

"Are you jealous?" said Annette.

"No. Because it's no use kicking against it. You have had the whole of the fine bird! Whatever I may do, I shall never have more than a piece of him."

We will not repeat what Annette answered. To a Gauloise by adoption, and shingled, a Gauloise unshorn! It was Marc who blushed.

They were making their plans together, when George came in with Vania. At the first words of the project she cried:

"Take me too! I will be the nurse."

Assia said:

"Why not? . . ."

George to take care of the child. Annette to look after the housekeeping. . . . Assia always managed to combine the agreeable and the useful: to take two good companions, and free herself from all worry by putting it on them. The refreshing thing about her was that she told them so quite frankly. Marc, abashed, began to apologize.

"Why, no, you silly," said Assia, "I am giving them pleasure. George was once an ant. She must have her larva to lick. And as to Mother Annette, she still has milk in her breasts; I am giving her back her leech: you. And even, let's go shares! . . . me."

George longed to pull the brazen hussy's ears. But at bottom she was delighted. Annette laughed. It was true. She became "grandmamma"—as is the instinct of all healthy women of her age, from whom the blood no longer flows, but who amass it with a flood of love. She would have been willing to suckle a few more children!

Once the decision was made, Marc, who had not cared about it the day before, felt relieved. He caught the common joy, and (his two women had seen well for him) it was a relief to escape for a time from the atmosphere of Paris, saturated with cares. To escape from oneself! He had a right, after such hard work, to play the schoolboy on holiday. To forget everything for three or four months. No danger of not finding, when one got back, all the forgotten cares with not one missing! To play the child . . . He had had so little time for that in his life of precocious and harassing troubles! He must hurry, and make up for lost time!

Jean Casimir, passing through Paris, paid him a visit the day before they left, and found a happier Marc than he had ever seen. When he heard of the trip, he expressed his approval, which no one had asked for, with a satisfaction that surprised them. Marc and Assia asked the reason for it. He did not explain, but he said:

"What a good idea! It's better for you that they should forget you."

Assia took him aside and questioned him:

"What do you know? Was he in any danger?"

"You may well suppose," said Jean Casimir, glaring at her, "that the trade you have put him to is not exactly a peaceful job."

Assia snapped:

"That I have put him to? He does what he must. And I do what I must."

"As you please! I do not discuss the order of the factors. The result is the same."

Assia forced herself not to continue the passage of arms, as she felt inclined. (Good Lord! How this Casimir irritated her!) To find out what he knew, she put on her most engaging smile:

"Then, in your opinion, Paris is not very safe for Marc, just now?"

"Not only Paris. Look out!"

He had dropped his irony. Assia by reaction took it up.

"They are too contemptible! . . . A fortnight's absence. Paris soon forgets."

"The account books don't forget. Debit and credit. All is written down."

"We will settle up when we get back," said Assia. "I have my credit too." And she pointed to her scar.

"It is settled," said Jean Casimir. "And your credit holds good only in Paris. But your debts follow you wherever you go. You are not well aware of the international connections of your creditors."

Assia shrugged her shoulders. This *poseur* thought he could frighten her! . . . Jean Casimir did not insist. Let them fend for themselves! Every man for himself!

XLVII

How free, light, and happy the four of them were, as they left Paris! They felt that they had left behind them all the troubles and shadows of the past. Annette was not the least young of heart. She rejoiced in the restored happiness of her children, and in this holiday they were allowing themselves together. If she had had any scruple about going with them, she had been unable to conceal her joy that Assia had forced her to accept; she frankly confessed it and her beaming countenance amused Assia. Annette caught her mocking glance:

"Are you laughing at me?"

"I am admiring you! . . ."

"It's the same thing. . . ."

"You look as if you were beginning life anew."

"I begin anew every morning, with you, the beginners."

"Not only with us."

"What? Not only?"

"You really begin again on your own account."

"Upon my word, I'm afraid you are right. . . . Disgraceful, isn't it? At my age!"

"No, indeed! I wish I could feel sure that I will do the same when I reach it. But I don't know that I shall be able to . . . I envy your eyes. You have the eyes of a newly made bride."

"Are you mad?" said Annette, ashamed and pleased.

"No, you are."

"You both are," said Marc.

"And I too!" cried George.

They were mad, all four of them. . . . *Beata stultitia* . . . The four innocents laughed.

Towards morning, Annette watched alone, sitting in a corner of the carriage. The others were asleep. She brooded over them. When dawn showed white on the fringe of the high plateaux, she thought: "Already! . . ." She had wished the night would never end. She held all those she loved under her wings. Beside her, her son, with closed eyes, leant his face towards the maternal shoulder. Annette bent over his young forehead, scarred by the nails of care, to study the book of wounded days. Many secrets were written there. Ah! if she could but have taken his wounds upon herself! . . . She moved her shoulder forward under the sleeper's head, which rested there. Marc's eyes half opened, and the shadow disappeared from his face. He smiled as his mother's mouth lightly brushed his eyelids. Without moving from the support of her shoulder, he whispered:

"Our first night journey, together . . ."

"There have been others," murmured Annette.

"When?"

"Before you were born."

"Where were we going?"

"I was flying to the fields to bring forth my calf. . . ."

"Like the cow Io?"

"No, no gadfly was stinging me. I had happiness in my womb."

"Those were the good days!" said Marc, with tender irony.

"They were not bad for you—you danced."

"I am glad to hear it! And you, what were you doing? Were you singing?"

"You are right! . . . My hymn of Jeanne d'Albret."

"Should we begin over again?"

"What?"

"The Gospel of Mark."

"Without missing a line."

"All the chapters were not good. I made you bleed, more than once."

"It was I who made your claws."

"What luck for us, in this hard life, that we should have met each other!"

"Do you call it meeting? Seed of my field!"

"Where does the seed come from?"

"I don't know. I made you mine."

"And if the wind had carried me to another field?"

"You could never have escaped. I would have made you from any seed."

"A little wheat, many tares."

"And poppies and cornflowers . . . Everything is not good to eat. But the whole makes my bouquet."

"My more than mother, my friend, there is in both of us—you have given me—folly mingled with reason."

"That is best. Could we have lived without it? The poppy and cornflower lighted us in the sunless years."

"And you are right. If I have not gone to the bottom many times, with despair and shame pulling at my feet, it is because I danced in your womb."

"You are dancing still, to the rhythm of the train. Let us dance through our sorrows, my dear boy, like midges in the sunshine!"

The first ray touched the hoar-frost on the window-pane.

Marc sat up, and his clear eyes gazed at the ray resting on his mother's cheek, and the new day on the plain:

"A day of life for the midges!" he said. "Let's dance!"

XLVIII

George and Assia spent the days running about the mountains. Torn between two passions—love of the child, and love of sport—George had ended by leaving the child to Annette, who offered to relieve her of him. She felt rather ashamed; but so much the worse! Her legs and lungs, all her young foal's body, cried out for the race towards the summits and the sun. Annette did not complain of the task; at first she had tried to follow them with too eager confidence in her alpine prowess of yesterday; but her heart took upon itself to remind her that a lifetime had gone by between yesterday and to-day. In the middle of a climb, she had been obliged to stop, pierced by an arrow. She was choking; but she managed to hide it from the three others:

"Go ahead, youngsters! I will follow at my own pace."

She pretended to lag behind picking flowers. The laughing climbers went on. She was left alone, seated above the valley, drenched with sweat—less from the climb than from the sudden heart attack. She recovered her breath, and her hand, as it pressed the artery under her bosom, felt the enemy in his field. She was forced to realize her limitations; illness, the recent attacks of influenza had reminded her of them; but she had refused to admit them to herself. She had said:

"Well, for a time! I will go easy. As soon as I am cured, I will reconquer my frontier of the Rhine! . . ."

She had to confess to-day that she must put back her frontiers. How far? And for how long could she hold them? . . . Campaign in France . . . And at the end,

the farewell of Fontainebleau . . . With a smile pinching the corner of her half-open mouth, she grew ironical at her Iliad. All said and done, they were all the same! Like that ant on the slope, she had carried her little twig. . . . Whither and why? The question was not even asked. One had quite enough to think about to bear the burden without stumbling! . . . But the strange thing is that when we are about to be relieved of it, we say to ourselves: "So soon over!"

She went down slowly to a turning from which she could see the little chalet below in the sunlight. She sat down on the warm grass with her knees up and her hands clasped round her ankles. Against the noisy background of the valley, with its torrent and bells, she heard, close at hand, the voice of the child, whose little legs were running after cheeping chickens. And, in a moment, everything grew confused in her heart. Where was she? Was she the grandmother, the mother, or the child? . . . The good thing, when one has reached the end of the journey, is that we can go over it all again, we know it all, and can enjoy it all. We cannot do that at the beginning. She enjoyed the journey so much that she loitered in the middle. She saw herself thirty years ago. The tips of her breasts burnt her. It was her child playing at her feet. She had forgotten the reminder of her age by pain, a moment ago. Time dragged at the rope in vain. Her natural inclination was towards youth. Her mind was not deceived. . . .

"I know, I know . . . But I shut my eyes. I evade it. . . ."

She did not look too closely into what she was dreaming of, with open eyes, amidst the golden hum of bees sucking the gentians and broom.

But another looked, without asking leave. Marc had

grown anxious as to what had become of his mother. He turned back, leaving the others to continue their walk. She did not hear him coming. He stopped to look at her. He caught her unawares. She showed him an unexpected Annette—yet a woman whom he recognized, in the halo of memory. His child-eyes had seen her when she was the same age as he was now . . . It was but the image of an instant: the dreamer, warned by her antennæ, turned her head, had a surprise of confused joy, and with one swoop, like a swallow, came back to the to-day. Marc found his mother again. He sat down beside her, and they talked affectionately. But he did not forget what he had seen in those clear eyes and parted lips: the naïve dream, and the desire of renewal. And Annette, confusedly knowing that she had been seen, like a woman bathing in a stream, did not protest; tender and ashamed (the harm was done!), she seemed to excuse herself:

"Horrid boy, don't look any more! . . . You saw me. . . . Pardon!"

They talked of various familiar matters which did not touch the depths of their thoughts. But, as they talked, the relation between them was reversed, unawares. She was younger, and he was older. They had, as it were, made an exchange of years so that the balance of the accounts was reëstablished. They felt that they had become equals and companions. She was not surprised by this fraternity. But Marc was silent, and seemed shy; and Annette felt shy too: for she knew that he was going to touch upon some secret. Hers or his own? A slight inward tremor warned her that it was hers, when her big son, laying his hand on hers, said hesitatingly, then calmly:

"Why don't you marry him, mother?"

She was thunderstruck! She never expected to hear that secret unveiled . . . What? What secret? It was a secret to herself. That such a thought, which she had stifled, which she thought dead, should have become visible in her eyes, overwhelmed her. She hung her head, crushed. She wanted to cover her face with her hands. But she could not move. Marc, looking at her, saw her confusion. He took her tenderly in his arms. She nestled in them, hiding her eyes, unable to speak a word; and her silence was an avowal. How young she was, and how touching her confusion! Marc said:

"Forgive me! . . ."

She replied, without raising her head:

"I am ashamed that such things can be read in me! But you are mistaken."

He tried to raise her head with his hands:

"Look at me!"

She said "No!" and plunged back into her hiding place. He smiled, and said, stroking her head:

"Don't be ashamed! What is there to be ashamed of? He loves you. You love him. And we love him. He is worthy of you. He is better than we are."

Annette raised her head, and blushing, but with recovered firmness, looked him in the face:

"Whom do you mean? . . . You don't know, my dear boy. . . . You can't know . . . Is it Bruno you mean?"

"And who else?"

"No, you don't know. . . . Even if I were thinking of marrying, it would not be Bruno I would marry."

"Don't you love him?"

"Even if I love him."

"I don't understand."

"Don't understand! Leave me, at least, that little secret corner! We can't live without shade."

Marc was silent. He had understood. Annette saw that he was going to speak again. She put her hand over his mouth:

"Be quiet, my boy!"

He persisted:

"Marry the other!"

"No, I will not."

"Why?"

"I can't . . . Let it alone! It's ridiculous . . . An old woman . . ."

"You are as young—you are much younger than I am."

"I was. My day is past."

"That's not true. Some hearts are worn out at twenty. To yours life is always new. You start off again every morning."

"Oh, no! Oh, no! . . . I don't want to be the Wandering Jewess, marching on for all eternity . . . Enough of trudging! Enough of loving!"

"You don't want us any more?"

"I want nothing but you. I have a right only to my children."

"That's not enough."

"Not enough, my Marc and his Marcassin!"

"No, for the young go off a-hunting and leave Annette at the foot of the hill, as they did to-day."

"Poor Annette! She can wait . . . Run along, my youngsters! To each his turn!"

"Annette!" he said, thoughtlessly; and then, in confusion: "Pardon, mother! . . ."

But she laughed:

"But I like it. You have become the head of the family."

He hesitated, troubled. Then—

"Annette be it! . . . I don't think it just that life should stop at the children's threshold. When it is still as full of sap as yours, it is a crime to stifle it. I feel like a murderer. In nature, when the little ones have learnt to fly, the father and mother go on their own way. You are not meant to be chained to another's hearth. My hearth is yours. But have your own hearth! And let it be mine! Let me help you to rebuild your independent life!"

"I am in no danger of ever lacking independence. My dear boy, I need nobody's help to take it. I am in much greater need of someone to take it from me."

"I didn't make you say it! You still love. . . ."

"You," said Annette, turning away her head.

"Oh, you story-teller!"

"I am lying! I?" said Annette impetuously, squeezing her son's cheeks between her hands.

"Why yes, you love me, that's granted! Then why don't you confide everything to me?"

"What have I to confide to you? You indiscreet creature, you walk in everywhere, you know everything."

"Well, since I know, confess!"

"That's already done."

They looked into each other's eyes. Marc asked in an undertone:

"What holds you back? Are you afraid of wronging one of the two?"

Annette silenced him with a gesture:

"That's enough, my Marc! Let's say no more about it! . . . Perhaps I will speak of it again in a few months. I want to think it out alone. You trouble me. . . . But I like my trouble since it comes from you. Thank you for having forced me to see clearly into myself!"

They sat close together, in silence, looking down on the valley at their feet. Annette said:

"My big son!"

"Do you know," said Marc, "I am holding myself down not to say: my little sister? . . ."

"And so I am," said Annette. "We grow smaller as we grow old. You are my senior now."

"Lean on me then!"

Annette leant upon him. They listened to the rumbling of a passing train in the valley below. Annette said:

"It's fine to have reached the point when we are just brother and sister; and the sister says to the brother: 'You are the head. It is your turn to guide me!'"

Marc had taken her hand. And at that moment the noon Angelus rang out below—they both had a vivid undefined impression that a cycle of their lives was ended. It was the deep light of a lovely day . . . But after that came the night. For beyond that instant they could see no further into the days that were to come.

And that stoppage of the vision fell upon their hearts like a danger they could not understand. But they did not speak of it. And they went down again towards the house.

XLIX

The happy days flowed on, confiding and intimate days. Mother and son had now opened the doors of silence and destroyed the false moral barriers. They fraternally exchanged their mutual secrets, which hitherto they had avoided doing. And each had the joy of finding in the other his own weaknesses and impulses, the mysterious currents of his life. Thus many enigmas of their destiny, which troubled them when alone and with which each separately reproached himself, were cleared up or relieved when borne by both together. They smiled as they confessed to each other their imprudences and errors, their taste for fire, their taste for danger which more than once had made them seek it to their cost and burn themselves by contact with "dangerous" souls. They had to agree that they preferred their burns to the peaceful lukewarmness of so many "worthy people" of their acquaintance. They reproached themselves for their coldness towards these "worthy people." . . . People who were esteemed . . . And rightly, too . . . Such "worthy people!" . . . They were like Roland's mare. She had no faults. But she was dead . . . There is no hope! The ferment of life, revolt, is lacking in them. That good, exhausted soil now produces nothing. Manure and the plowshare, "the dangerous soul" and the tillage of revolt, are needed to renew it. The dull field of sterile worthiness must be thoroughly furrowed, and sown with the burning seed that gives life by dying! But one can do it only by being both the plowshare and the seed . . . To give one's life. To give one's death. . . .

Marc was only too sure that he would give it; it was

an unavowed certainty to him, in which desire and fear were mingled (the spirit accepted but the young flesh shrank back . . .). Annette guessed at these thoughts in her son; but she tried to put them aside; she tried to persuade herself that he would be spared that sacrifice, as she herself had been throughout a life of dangers and struggles. She made the usual mistake of judging the future by the past; she did not see that the era which Marc's life had entered was that of the great upheavals of the earth, on the brink of which her own life had stopped . . . Is it quite certain that she did not see it? She turned her eyes the other way . . . Later! Later! . . . There will be time enough to think of it. Do not trouble these happy days! A stream of peace flows through the air.

L

Annette was walking in the forest halfway up the hillside. The dark trees mingled with the half bare beeches which were beginning to put forth their spring plumage. Thus mingled, clinging to the steep sides of the mountain, they looked like an army mounting to the assault. In the distance, from above, came the sound of the woodmen's axes and the crash of falling trees. The pathway wound in a long ring round the mountain side. It was cut here and there by a young torrent, spanned by a haphazard bridge, with no rail, roughly built and risky; and by a chute—a steep and stony furrow used for bringing down the rough timber. There was nothing to warn strangers of this but a notice in German, which had been blown down by the wind and which the carelessness of the country had not troubled to replace, as all the natives knew the danger.

Annette knew it too, from her experience of the mountains. But ahead of her there was a family party who did not know it. The father and mother, seated near the chute, which made a bend just there, were quietly watching their two children and the governess, who were gathering the first violets. The little girl, of eight or nine, venturing to the edge of the chute, risked one leg on the side to reach a clump of primroses. No danger threatened. The chute seemed forsaken. But it was imprudent to walk in it. Annette was about to warn the parents when the little girl lost her footing on the loose ground of the slope and slid down into the hollow of the chute. The child laughed at the adventure and was in no hurry to climb out. At that very moment, hoarse cries from above gave warning of the descent of a load of timber. Before

the child's parents saw what was happening, Annette, after trying in vain to reach down and catch hold of the child's outstretched hand, jumped down and dragged her into the hollow of a promontory formed by the roots of an old pine tree incrusted in a rock which hung, suspended, over the chute. The avalanche of wood and stones passed beside them with a rush, leaving them untouched. The distracted family had witnessed the scene swift as a flash of lightning, before any of them, frozen with terror, had come to any conscious decision. When the rescuer had hoisted the child, who was beginning to get frightened, on to the bank, she was received with transports. The father's emotion was almost hysterical: he embraced Annette with tears. Annette, passing from arms to arms, bewildered by the flow of words and tears that inundated her, felt an irritated amusement at hearing once more the volubility of the Italian language, which she loved.

When the first frenzy of feeling had calmed down, and the hugging was over, they introduced themselves. The man was very dark, with blue-black freshly shaved cheeks against which Annette's cheeks had been rubbed, and with a long asymmetrical face and blazing eyes; he was intelligent, hypernervous, but (as Annette soon noticed) he made use of his nerves, like a good actor engrossed in his part, who watches his own acting. He proved to be a banker of the Veneto, on holiday with his family at a hotel near the chalet where the Rivières were encamped. He had seen them in passing, and his attention, ever on the alert, had recognized Annette from having seen her once in Timon's office, where the rough master had called upon the secretary's memory for precise details of correspondence and business. Annette's connection with the *condottiere* had not failed to rouse his curiosity; he had taken pains to inform himself upon that point, and what

he heard, good or evil, had interested him in the lady. He too was acquainted with the *condottiere!* His roving eyes had quietly taken the measure of the mother, son, and daughter-in-law; none of them had seemed uninteresting to him. He invited the three of them to supper that night. It was difficult to escape, in this place where they were almost the only visitors (the season was only just beginning, and the hotel had been open only a week). The gratitude of the parents needed expression: the best thing was to yield with a good grace. There followed several hours of cordial intercourse, in which the infectious warmth of the Italians conquered even the reserve of Marc and Assia. This affectionate expansion was not feigned, and the confidence displayed by the banker had nothing to gain from his obscure companions of an evening; it deserved some return from them. They talked quite freely.

Leone Zara was a Dalmatian Jew, of an old family settled in Venice; he managed one of the most important post-war banks. His wife, an American Jewess, also belonged to the financial world. The Bank of the Adige and the Piave had managed, after the march on Rome, to take sides with the government, and was one of its supporters. It devoted a large part of its active funds, and of the deposits of its customers, to works in the interests of Fascism: a party library, and the costly organization for the propaganda of Italian books abroad. It did more—but Leone Zara modestly touched the subject only very lightly—it liberally subsidized persons whose fidelity to the party was of value (Zara winked slyly): they managed to give all their *people* generously paid jobs: the ticklish susceptibility of these personages was thus safeguarded. Zara held forth more complacently upon expeditions in Central Asia at once political, commercial and scientific, financed by his

bank. A refined and well-informed man, of an ancient cultured race, with courteous manners (Annette compared him with her Perigord boor), he had a taste for art and intellectual matters. He also had a taste for psychological classification of human types; and for his private delectation he had his secret museum of anomalies, abnormal souls, that the troublous times had formed or deformed, supermen or those who are subnormal. He was proud of his "monsters": to him there was nothing insulting in the word; they were caused by the fiery spurt of nature, which often missed her end, or went beyond it, in an attempt to produce a new type . . . or perhaps, the embryo of a new species. He did not hide the fact that he had a choice specimen in the very person who held him on a leash: the *Duce*. . . . They held each other mutually: Money, the Fist. And both had hard heads, one of Rome, the other of Tyre and St. Mark. . . .

He drew a vivid picture of his master. He spoke of him without reserve, with attraction, as a spectator in his box speaks of a stage tyrant. And, according to him, it was thus the *Duce* planned and fashioned himself: as one makes a scenario. He acknowledged it, this *artifex* for whom the world was but a substance to be kneaded! To that degree a *commediante* (a *tragediante* . . . for he never laughed!) that everything was theatrical material: nations, the State, public safety. . . . He incorporated everything in his part. He seized upon, he did violence to, the human masses; he entered into them. . . . He remained apart! He was alone, even in conquest. A strong desire, but little love. Little sympathy, little respect for humanity. But rather much more a force of hate, and over all a thorough contempt for all those cringing men who flung themselves under his feet. The word "masses" had actually for him the meaning of a mass of clay for

the sculptor's violent fingers. And after all, what counted, what filled his arid ardent soul, was not men or States, it was his work. . . . And that meant something! To an *artifex* of his stature work is much more important than it is to the ordinary *ego* of average dimensions—more than vanity, more than money, even more than glory. . . . It is the smoking torch of action fighting a dark battle in solitary spaces. Check, victory, what does it matter? Act! To act, to fight, that is the only affirmation against nothingness. . . .

Annette followed on the long mobile lips of the banker, grimacing with passionate pleasure (and he too was an *artifex!*), the personality he evoked; and she saw one of Shakespeare's adventurers fighting the opaque dream of life, and fashioning destiny, with strokes of his sword, from the thick and bleeding darkness. . . . Zara, who also had his part in the play, said:

"So much the worse, so much the better, for those whose fortune (or misfortune) it is to be a piece of that substance which the sculptor crushes between his fingers in modeling his work! In this epoch of enormous masses in fusion, pregnant with energies which impotent democracy allows to wear themselves out and mutually destroy each other, there are only two blast-furnaces which know how to make use of them: the *Duce's* Rome, and the U.S.S.R. But the latter destroys all the ancient order of things and aspires to found a new order. The other adapts the elements of the past, renewing them by changing the form rather than the basis; it has no confidence in progress, it maintains the old defenses: king, Church, capital, family and property; inoculating them with the new virus: syndicates, federations of professions, corporations, workers' organizations, so as to render them acceptable. . . .

Zara naturally found his advantage in the old order, re-

consolidated, agglomerated in armed cement, with its old injustices founded on Roman law, its hierarchies, divisions of castes and trades, its classes privileged by birth or adventure, and its plebs—*Populusque*—with their *Imperator*.

It was not that he had any illusions as to the dangers of a social construction which depended on the violent genius of one man. He knew more than anyone else of this man's moral and physical defects, his weaknesses, illnesses, abrupt and violent oscillations, his disquieting fits of temper and will, that *alea* which shook the ground as the earthquakes perpetually threaten eternal Rome. From day to day the whole edifice, consisting more of Piranesi decoration than foundations, might give way. To stake on him, the man, or the work was risky. But the banker was a gambler, like all those who have to do with fortune. To stake on the Prince, or stake against the Prince. . . . There was no question of hesitation—for to-day. As for to-morrow one would see! . . . He had long quick fingers. If the Prince had read Machiavelli, the valet had read him too. Besides, he did not attach an excessive importance to fortune; he knew it was fleeting. He was as ready to lose as to win, getting warm over the game, but as a game, and keeping his irony cool. The *Duce's* terrible seriousness did not affect him—though he knew how to attune himself to it. He was a Jew of Ecclesiastes, feverish, avid, and detached.

His lucid glance sought Annette's as he spoke. He was too complacent in ascribing his feelings to her. In other days, and at another age, she might, perhaps, have felt some curiosity about the *condottiere*. But age and experience had dulled her curiosity. She had lost interest in the adventure that life was to such as Cortez, Pizarro, the *Duce*, Timon. She was not impressed, like the ninnies, by these great forces, with their set jaws, whose violent

glance, falling like the blow of a cudgel, makes the masses bend their backs, sweating in their skins with fear and pleasure—the pleasure of being walloped. She knew, as well as Zara, that these great forces have their weaknesses, that these great walls have their fissures, and fall to pieces all of a sudden. With this difference from Zara, that it was, perhaps, because of this pitiful side, which they hid like a disgrace, that she took some interest in them. While these frenzied individuals braced their muscles to raise themselves above the herd, she watched their convulsive efforts to emerge from it, to dominate it. She knew beforehand that they would be defeated. . . . This one like the rest. . . .

"Black *Duce!* You will be vanquished. We all are, we all will be, in the end. And it is this dénouement foreseen from the beginning of the tragedy which interests us in these conquerors: Œdipus Rex, Coriolanus and Macbeth! . . . One more! Smoking torch, you will be extinguished. Living dream, bestir yourself, and die! . . ."

Marc felt neither this attraction for the Roman torch nor this pity (which the torch would have regarded as the most outrageous insult): he would have liked to crush it under his feet. (Hatred is also sometimes a form of attraction: a shield to defend oneself against it.) What Marc saw most clearly, in the fresco brushed by the deft hand of the Venetian Ghetto, was not the man with the jaw and the cudgel, but the millions of backs bent beneath the cudgel, which drew themselves up, in exaltation, after being beaten. The cowardly young men (he knew too many of them, in France and elsewhere!) who whine over the weakness of the times, and sigh for a *Duce* or a *Führer*—a foot at their backsides! If they are so fond of strength, let them show their own! To count on that of another, to delegate to him by proxy their own, the

strength they wish for, the strength they can't show, that they have not got—can anything be more abject? Crouching dogs! Cringing dogs! Let them be whipped! . . . This little male had (who knows?) a feeling of obscure rivalry and revolt against those other big males who reigned over the subject herd. He could never have sacrificed himself for one man. It was not enough! He had taken their measure! And he had an abomination for the "*Qualis artifex!* . . ." He needed a higher object for sacrifice; more than one man—the peoples, the humbled and subjected masses themselves, the whole of mankind. . . . But he could not strike the balance between the two terms: serve men, and act upon them—act through them, act against them, if necessary, in order to act for them! To know how to command and how to obey: the two poles. . . . (It takes the two poles to make the globe.)

Assia, as hostile as he was to the black backs, did not conceal her interest in the Fascist experiment. With her the violence even of mortal combat did not exclude a substratum of sympathy for a worthy adversary. Her only real aversion was for those who evaded the conflict, those who wore masks, those who oiled themselves all over to escape, for the viscous, the water-snakes which slipped through one's hands, for the eunuchs, the impotent, and the amorphous. The shrewd Zara perceived this attraction under her animosity. He flashed his lark-catching mirror: that impulse toward action aroused in the brains of Italian youth by the black sun, hidden but reflected by the thousands of aeroplane wings of Balbo's covey of rapacious birds. He pressed the two young people to come and feel the quickened pulse of that young Italy which foreigners know so little; Fascism had reared it, like bulls, not for the table but for the arena. Assia easily appreciated that flame of constant action, even under an aggressive form which grouped the young in an army ready to march upon the enemy. . . .

"But who, if you please, is the enemy?"

Her steely eyes were not beguiled by the fool-capturing mirror:

"These marchers-to-the-war, against whom are they marching, and against what? And for whom, for what, towards what? Where are you going? Do you know? . . . I don't mean you, Monsieur Zara; you probably know; I am not so indiscreet as to enquire; but the others, your people, your troops, *his* troops—even himself. He, the man who leads them, he the stage manager! Does he even know the end of his play? What exactly does he want? What does he believe in? Has he settled his scenario? He has altered it ten times, he will alter it ten times more—war, peace, the fist, pacts—if the public has patience to sit out the play. At the present moment, your ideal of Italian Fascism (you disguise it!) does not go beyond an armed nation, barbed and barb-wired. To your black bands, ready to march, who is not the enemy? The enemy is everything outside, beyond the enclosure, beyond the Empire: Rome confronting the barbarians. . . . So then I am the barbarian, we are the enemy? Cards on the table! Your combat is not for us. Your combat is against us. And are you quite sure that it is for yourselves? Has it any aim? Does it think of such a thing? Interpreted in its best and highest sense—the tragic sense of the literary cocks who sound the clarion of battle, who do not fight themselves, but make others fight: the Nietzscheans—the spirit of battle and of primacy, of eternal imperialism, is inspired by your Fascism in all people; it is, according to your *Duce*, the very formula of life for ever. It is combat for combat's sake, without aim, without progress, without hope. . . . ('*I need no hope*

to undertake . . .') An old tune!—Well, as for me, I need hope, and I want to know where I am going. Where are you going?"

Zara's long mouth twisted, he laughed:

"We go. What more can one want? What men need, at long intervals, is *Animatori*, to wind up the rusty clock of life. Don't you think that your France could do with an *Animatore*, like ours, to shake your immovable democracy out of its siesta?"

"None for me!" said Assia. "I come from other parts. I need no animator. I am a Scythian. And the fight we are waging in the U.S.S.R. is not to carve the statue of a demagogue. We fight for all men, for a better future."

"And meanwhile," said Zara, "the present is worse."

"I would not exchange it for any other," said Assia. "It is like me when I carried my baby in my womb. It bears the future."

"Well, every man to his taste!" said the banker, with a charming smile. "For you, Madame, the fine child—the future!—I am satisfied with the present."

They parted very good friends—since, thank God! any occasion that might force them to be enemies seemed to be lacking. The young people seemed inoffensive to Zara (he had never read any of Marc's writings). Mutual courtesy made them treat differences of opinion merely as topics for conversation. To Zara, the only serious part of the meeting was the woman's deed of rescue which had snatched his little girl from death. Family feeling was the only passion in him that escaped skepticism. His lively glance, which was amused by the discussions of his chance interlocutors but attached no importance to them, really rested only on Annette, whom he enveloped with his gratitude; and the young Rivière brood benefited by it. He pressed them to visit Italy, and invited them to his

house in Rome. He placed himself at their service for any occasion when he might be of use to them. It did not seem that they would ever call upon his kindness. Their plan of travel was limited to Switzerland, and they did not intend to go further than Lugano. Time and the purse were limited.

Time was even more limited than they supposed.

LI

I think it was on the eve of their departure for Tecino that I saw them. I was sitting in a field above the road that clung to the mountain side. I recognized Marc with his arm through his mother's. I noticed how careful Marc was in helping his companion, who seemed tired, to cross a little stream. The child trotted along gathering flowers with Assia, who lagged behind as she climbed like a goat up the banks. As she passed, she caught sight of a nest of violets above the bench where I was seated; taking no notice of me, she pulled them up, sprinkling me with earth, and jumped down again. She further resembled a goat by her golden eyes. I looked chiefly at Annette. Her face was bathed in happiness. At one moment when Marc bent down, looking for stones for her to step upon in crossing the stream, I saw how her eyes brooded on her boy's fine head. They disappeared round the bend. I thought I should find them at the hotel, in the evening. They were not there. And, next day, when I enquired for their address, I heard that they had left by the first train.

LII

The sun had fled to the other side of the St. Gotthard. They followed it to Lugano. Under a trellised arch over a hollow road, they came upon George, laughing, with her arms raised to the inaccessible bunches of grapes, her mouth open as if to drink them. She threw herself into their arms.

She had gone to join her father who had been cited as witness in a lawsuit. It was the case of that Italian aviator, a *fuoruscito*, who had scattered sacks of anti-Fascist pamphlets over Milan, and on his way back had broken his wings against the St. Gotthard. Wounded, cared for, but arrested by the Federal Government, he appeared before the Court of Bellinzona for infraction of the neutrality of Swiss territory. Witnesses in his favor were not lacking; they came from the principal emigration groups in which he was known and appreciated. And Julien had been appealed to. However overburdened with work he might be, and bewailing in his heart every hour of his time stolen from science, Julien never hesitated, when necessary, to do his duty as a citizen of the world, and to put the weight of his authority in the scale in which the oppressed, those who rebelled against tyranny, were being weighed. *"In tyrannos!"* the words of Schiller, this old liberal bore graven in his heart! His evidence had made a sensation at the trial, in which the accused in the end became the accuser. The great exiles, come from London and Paris, had seized the opportunity of publicly slapping their persecuters in the face. And the democratic magistrates of the Swiss canton, who could not conceal their sympathy with the champions of liberty, had decided on an acpuittal. But

the Federal Council at Berne, uneasy at the stir caused by this decision, and anxious to soothe the outraged pride of their dangerous neighbor, gilded the pill by condemning the accused to a brief imprisonment.

All this news overheated public opinion; and the noisy nonchalance of Lugano was stirred up by it. Under the arcades and in the cafés there was a buzzing of angry wasps. Two-legged flies were not lacking. They came and went from shore to shore. In those happy days, the walls of Lugano were hung, as on the feast of Corpus Christi, with listening black ears. There were some of all kinds, for natives and for foreigners. Neither Annette, George, nor Marc took any notice of them. But Assia's experience made her sniff the air at once. The moment she entered any assembly she smelt out the pike. Her ever roving glance scanned every face and infallibly lit upon the fish, and with a quick movement drove in the hook. The other felt the prick, fidgeted on his chair, with a scratched throat, tried to get away from the line by turning his attention elsewhere, and finally took himself off. More than one of these silent duels of glances were fought round her three companions, seated at a table in a *confetteria,* without their suspecting it. Marc, who for the pleasure of rousing George's jolly hearty childish laugh, was amusing himself boyishly by wielding his Harlequin wand on the backs of the "negroids," as he called the blackshirts, opened his eyes in amazement when Assia, laying her hand on his, whispered:

"Not so loud!"

He asked:

"Why?"

And Assia, upon reflection, said to herself:

"After all! Why not? So much the worse and so much the better for the fish lying in wait! I see them

turning green in their broth. A pinch of salt and we'll have them cooked!"

Spies on their rounds abroad are used to insults; they would not have taken much notice of the insolence of a few passing tourists. But Marc was soon under observation when they saw his intimacy with Julien, whose part in the trial had attracted attention. Julien was at the head of the black list, as Honorary President of the Anti-Fascist League; he was under special surveillance, which he did not avoid; he scorned it. His young companion at Lugano got the benefit of it.

Among those eager to share in their conversation was a young Italian whom Marc had met before in anti-Fascist circles in Paris. He had a handsome, intelligent face, marred by a dark red birthmark on the cheek and a certain tic, the nervous opening and shutting of one eyelid. His name was Buonamico, and he made a display of hysterical excitement against the Government. From Paris to London and Brussels, through the different colonies of *émigrés*, he came and went burning with holy agitation, warming up discouraged loyalties, submitting in ambiguous words vague and violent projects, bombs and plots, reminiscent of the *carbonari* conspirators. The old politicians among the *émigrés* looked upon him as a romantic, and distrusted him. The young, more inclined to action, lent a ready ear, but, taught by experience, received his suggestions with reserve. He was tenacious and patient. And he spoke, with tears and suppressed rage, of his old mother and young brother, who were detained at Faenza as hostages, and whose lives were threatened. His emotion was shared by the exiles, many of whom endured the same sorrows. He had access everywhere, was serviceable, active, and not a cadger; his only mania was that he was always wanting to deposit some valise or papers with one

person or another—a request which seemed justifiable, as he was constantly on the move; but no one felt greatly flattered at being chosen as the depositary, for recent unpleasantness with the Paris police had taught them that it was not always good for an exile that his right hand should not know what his left hand had received. People generally arranged to pass on the deposit to someone else. In the end, Marc had received and kept it on various occasions—though with no pleasure—for he thought it disobliging to evade the request, and he pitied Buonamico for these affronts. But no doubt he was more thin-skinned than Buonamico, who showed no resentment, nor in fact the slightest recollection: for he indefatigably renewed his attempts with those who had dodged them two or three times. If there was any shame in it, it should rather have lain with the refusers, for nothing had occurred to justify their distrust.

If Buonamico was without rancor, he was not lacking in gratitude and he favored Marc with special attentions. Two years before, when plans were on foot for the escape of the prisoners on the Lipari Islands, many people, men and women in the liberal circles of France, England and Belgium, were actively engaged in this work; and Marc, who was full of zeal for these attempts, had imprudently hinted that he knew more about them than he said. Buonamico did not press him to tell; he spontaneously confided to him under the seal of secrecy another plan of escape in which he was collaborating; for in the fever of the enterprise several parallel plans were being pursued. In exchange, Marc told him what he knew of his own plan. He had not boasted of this to Assia, who at the first glance had passed an unfavorable judgment on Buonamico. He had an unpleasant impression when he heard, a few weeks later, that the Lipari authorities had been

warned, and had defeated his plan. Trying to overcome these misgivings, which he did not care to explain to himself, he hazarded, without mentioning any name, a few words about Buonamico's plan to certain well-informed people, who shook their heads categorically, as they declared:

"Nothing serious in that!"

He asked himself whether he had not supplied the thief with good money for false coin. But there was so much mutual disparagement between anti-Fascists of equal sincerity, that Marc found no sufficient reason to subscribe to their judgments one against another; and nothing authorized him to establish a connection between the chance failure of a plan and indiscretion on the part of Buonamico. He merely avoided meeting him from that time onwards.

Since then more than a year had elapsed when Buonamico met him at Lugano. He displayed a too lively joy. Marc responded badly. Buonamico was unmoved by this. He praised the temerity of the aviator of the broken wings; but he loudly declared that it was a childish deed to risk one's life for the sake of scattering a little paper, and that it would have been little more difficult to go drop a basketful of explosives on the Palazzo Venezia. Marc made no answer. Julien, whom Buonamico sounded, needed no effort to keep silent; he kept his thoughts to himself. Assia took the flowers Buonamico offered her, she looked him straight in the face with no sweetness in her smile, smelled the bouquet, turned her back on him, and left the flowers lying on a bench. The only one of the group who responded to his advances was kind Annette, who was touched by Buonamico's accounts of his poor mother; they were often seen together; Annette listened patiently, and consoled the sorrowing son, who sometimes wiped away a tear and, grateful for her sympathy, respect-

fully kissed her hand with "*tante grazie.*" But Annette had no secrets to divulge. And Buonamico was discreet and did not abuse the kindness of the comforter; he kept himself at a distance from the little company.

Nevertheless, he was immediately aware of their plans for a trip to Italy. Marc and Assia had discussed it for the first time the previous evening, in the almost deserted hall of their hotel. There was no one present but Julien and Annette, and a little way off, a very correct old gentleman reading the *Times*, with a cup of coffee before him.

Since he had got beyond the wall of mountains that cast a shadow on the unfavored Northern land, Marc had been drunk with sunshine. His eyes rested longingly on the beautiful shores of Italy, blooming there, close at hand like a flower; in the sky above the capricious hills, he saw the warm mirage of Lake Como. Annette and Assia knew the enchanted land: Annette because she had stayed there in her youth, during her father's lifetime; and since the war she had passed through it several times on her travels. Assia had also visited it twice, during her fortunate childhood and in the days of the dark exodus. The two women had seen its double-face: the *palazzi* crowned with roses; and the fever, hunger, and filth. But around both was the magic circle of Circe, the serene and voluptuous light which bathes riches and poverty. They talked about it to each other, with a smile of understanding, as of a secret pleasure evoked only between initiates. Marc was the only one who did not know the savor of the fruit, and he longed to get his teeth into it; he had only to stretch out his arm to gather it. . . .

"Why shouldn't we go to Italy!"

The two women caught the ball on the rebound. To share with one we love a pleasure unknown to him is like eating a fruit with his mouth. Julien made certain objections; he did not think the trip advisable; secretly he saw the danger of it. But he knew that his prudence was generally exaggerated; why spoil the pleasure of his friends by telling them his fears for which there was really no serious foundation? Besides, Julien was not very much "in the know." Like most intellectuals, even of the extreme Left, he gave too much importance to ideas in the social conflict and was insufficiently informed on the economic situation. At that moment, his solicitude for Marc did not see any risks for the young polemist but those of anti-Fascism. He did not take into account the international federation of business, the feudal lords of industrial Imperialism, to whom Marc's campaigns were a source of anxiety. So he contented himself with advising Marc to watch his words, once he was past the frontier. Marc and Assia took it laughingly: they had nothing to watch, their one idea was to have a good time for a fortnight. No politics. A holiday from all serious business! . . . They would let Julien and George take the child back to Paris. Annette discreetly offered to go home too. But Assia said:

"What a sell for you, if we took you at your word!"

Annette said:

"That's true. Don't let me be sold!"

However, nothing had been decided; and they were surprised next day, when Buonamico accosted them with a smile, saying:

"When do you start?"

Marc, pretending not to understand, evaded the question. Assia frowningly blamed Annette's chatter. But Annette swore that she had not mentioned it. In the afternoon, Assia, walking in the exotic shade of the beautiful garden by the water side, perceived round the bend of a path the old gentleman who had been reading the *Times* sitting talking to Buonamico. Annette felt un-

comfortable that evening, in the hall of the hotel, when Assia, seeing the noble old man installing himself at a table near theirs, broke off in the middle of the conversation and got up, saying in a clear voice:

"Let's go and talk somewhere else!"

The explanation she gave them in the opposite corner of the hall did not satisfy Marc. Not that he was not struck by it; but he showed his impatience at Assia's perpetual suspicions; he pretended to make light of them as the disposition of an uneasy and troubled feminine mind. He taxed her with pusillanimity. Nothing could be more mortifying to Assia.

That was why, out of bravado, he did not avoid Buonamico, though he took no pleasure in seeing him; he even told him their plans for the journey. Buonamico warmly encouraged Marc. He planned the itinerary for him; and furnished him with the addresses of hotels that he recommended. And he regretted that he could not accompany them. He bewailed the fact that he was forbidden entrance to his native land.

The attraction of that land drew him to join Marc and Assia in walks to the frontier. Once, beyond Gandria, he crossed it, pressing his companions to do likewise. They had not got their passport visas; but Buonamico boasted that he knew paths where they would meet no one. Assia refused to play this schoolboy game, which, in the company of a *fuoruscito* (of what color?), was not worth the risks. Marc persisted in defiance; what had he to fear? Buonamico's risk was much greater; at least, so he said; but he promised to lead Marc to a little creek, sheltered by rocks, where they could find a boat which would take them back to Gandria, unseen, along the overhanging shore. He said he would show Marc that the Italian emigration had secret ways for the coming and going of their

propaganda. And everything fell out just as he said. Marc and Assia (for the latter, whom Marc scornfully advised not to go with him, had, of course, followed him) found the boat at the place indicated, hidden under the heavy foliage of overhanging trees, and they got back to Lugano without mishap. But Assia's confidence in Buonamico was not increased; for she thought that in risking this pawn on the chessboard, he must have been very sure of winning. She kept these reflections to herself; and those of the morrow likewise when she managed to worm out of Annette that in her absence Buonamico, greatly moved, had confidentially entrusted a letter for his poor mother to them; as his mother's house was watched he had taken the precaution, in order to avoid risk to the bearers, of enclosing the letter in another envelope addressed to a friend in Milan, who would undertake to pass it on.

Assia said nothing. Discussion was useless; the two simpletons had pledged themselves. To Annette it was an affair of the heart; to Marc, an affair of honor. Honor and heart did not trouble Assia much, when those she loved were at stake. She did not hamper herself with useless scruples. The night before they left Lugano, while Marc was asleep, she got out of bed, went through his clothes, found the pocketbook in which he had put the letter in the side pocket of his coat, removed it and with a clear conscience slid the booty under her pillow, and her cat-like body between the sheets, and to complete the joke, began to tickle Marc. He awoke, protesting, unable to make out why the madcap laughed and laughed.

Next day, she took her time to examine the stolen envelope; she unsealed it carefully, read and re-read, with puckered brow, a wicked look in her eyes, her breath coming through her nose; she studied the letter, recited it to herself from the first word to the last, then she tore it

into little bits, spat on it, as she might have spat in the writer's dirty face, and burned the pieces. Justice done, but not satiated, she licked her lips, and after meditation wrote another letter which she put into the intact envelope which she gummed down again. The whole found its way back to Marc's pocket, where she succeeded in depositing the billet-doux before their departure.

LIII

Their first days of idling on the happy shores of the opal lake were enchanted, like the Borromeans which rose like flowers from its waters. The cooing of the doves came from the warm shade of the gardens with the breath of the orange-trees; and the chromatics of their lazy oars kept tune with the laughter of the three school children on holiday. All three were free of care, unburdened, happy in body and light of heart, like the dandelion down that floats upon the fields. Annette was not the least youthful of the three. She climbed gayly, in spite of her heart. And she came down on foot from the Mottarone to Baveno by slippery slopes and hard rocky paths; her feet were sore that evening, and her ankles swollen next day. She took care not to mention it. But on arriving at Milan she was forced to give in. When she tried to get up she cried out, her loins were aching; she had to surrender for twenty-four hours, and spend the day in bed.

The other two birds did not lose a beakful: she drove them out of the room herself—"Go and peck at the streets and museums! . . ." They had only a fortnight for the Italian tour. It would not do to waste a single day. And so much the worse for cripples! . . . Annette laughed, putting a good face on ill-luck. And dozing between her sheets, avoiding any movement for fear of rousing the pain, with the window open, ears full of the gay noise, she let her eyes wander over the white balusters, astragals, and slender spires of the marble forest of the *Duomo*, rising above the roofs in the light sunlit mist, aureoled by the flight of white pigeons. The hours sped by uncounted, and she did not feel forsaken. The others did not come

back to lunch. She approved of their selfishness, and read Baedeker on Milan as a substitute for the tour she would have taken with them. She fell asleep as she read. . . .

A noise of steps in the passage, imperious knocks at the door. . . . She started. . . . It must have been between four and five in the afternoon. She said:

"Come in!"

There entered, one, two, three individuals with heavy cheeks and shaven jaws, rolling terrible and foolish eyes. By their comic-opera Iago appearance, Annette recognized them as police officers—surrounding Marc and Assia. And outside the closed door the military footsteps of a fourth watchdog could be heard in the passage. Marc was pale and restrained, he protested in a voice which choked with his efforts to keep from shouting. Assia, very much at her ease, exchanged a sly wink with Annette, over the shoulders of their guardians. With no further explanation, two of the three men set about searching their trunks and clothing. The other, coolly seated at Annette's bureau, was writing the report. In an instant her room and the adjoining one of the young couple were littered with clothing. The great paws foraged among Assia's chemises. Marc, furious, managed to swallow his rage. Assia, seated with her legs crossed, had lit a cigarette, and mocked the hunters with her eyes; she advised the officer to make a note of the trademark on her knickers. The coolness of Annette as she looked them up and down, and the jeers of the impudent cigarette-smoker stung them to the quick. They insisted on searching the invalid's bed, as well. Marc planted himself before it, vowing he would not allow it. Annette pushed him aside with her hand:

"Come, sirs, make my bed!"

And, leaning on her daughter-in-law, she walked calmly with stiff legs to the table at which the superintendent was seated, and made a movement to take up the telephone. He opposed it.

"Very well," she said, as if she were addressing the hotel porter, "then telephone to the Bank of the Adige and the Piave that Mme. Rivière wishes to speak to the director Leone Zara!"

The other asked, in surprise:

"The *Signore Commendatore?* What for?"

"I should like him to be present at this search!" she said.

"Do you know him?"

"Ask him!"

The police officers, taken aback, looked at each other; the two who had already seized the mattress stopped short, and looked questioningly at their chief. The superintendent made up his mind, and telephoned. The honeyed looks he displayed, when he heard the golden voice (the epithet is appropriate) of the *Commendatore* in person, attested the importance he attached to that gentleman: everyone knew that Zara was one of the pillars of the régime; if genius, or the fist, makes "*Duci*," it is Money that maintains them; without that support, flop! But the smile of obsequious devotion which cleft his face froze to an expression of consternation when, the message being delivered, the voice, repeating the name of Mme. Rivière, exclaimed, then waxed indignant. There was a vehement colloquy in which the superintendent in confusion explained what had occurred; the other invisible one fulminated; the superintendent protested, excused himself, and beat a retreat. The two women and Marc were silent, trying to follow the conversation, seizing on the angry shouts eructated by the telephone and the clumsy admissions of the agent, which made it clear that the police had fallen into the snare they had set themselves:

trying to avenge themselves for their first blunder, they had stumbled into a second trap, for they had failed to find anything to justify the arrest. The reprimand continued unappeased. The superintendent, flattened out, now replied only with protestations of devotion. Annette took the telephone out of his hand (he hastened to hand it over to her), and she apologized to the banker for disturbing him with this ridiculous incident. She thanked him and accepted his invitation to go and see him in a few days, in passing through Rome, and very haughtily deigned to cover the blunder of the police officers, listening anxiously, by declaring that everything was now settled. The superintendent eagerly agreed, and when the telephone was hung up again he burst into verbose apologies; he offered, with the help of his men, to repack the trunks they had turned out; but Assia considered that once was enough to have them wiping their hands on her underclothing, and relieved them of the task. The alarm over, reassured now as to the consequences of his *faux pas*, the superintendent recovered his assurance as a *galantuomo*, and paid the young woman a heavy compliment, congratulating himself that the misunderstanding had procured him the privilege of spending an afternoon in such charming company.

"I congratulate myself too, Signor Cavaliere," she replied, "for you have supplied me with a priceless piece of copy for my paper."

She had waited to the last moment to inform him that she was correspondent for an American newspaper. He nearly choked with dismay. Annette calmed him with a gesture, saying that the incident was closed. Marc put an end to the protestations of devotion, which were beginning again, by showing the invaders the door, with a stern gesture, without saying a word; he slammed it behind them, while Assia forced a shrill laugh.

Annette, silencing her, reproached them for their lack of prudence, and asked to be enlightened, at last, as to what had happened. Marc told her. Assia, maliciously, let him go on, watching his face and listening to his furious and confused account; she was bursting with laughter, for he could not understand what had occurred—he did not know the answer to the riddle. She revealed it in the end: he had taken Buonamico's letter to the address; as Assia had expected, the bearers had been caught in the trap by the police posted at the door. But when the letter was opened, in their presence, the round-eyed superintendent had found there this message:

"If you want to catch the fish, change the fly! The Buonamico is found out."

Marc looked foolish and bewildered:

"What? What?" he said. "And he gave me the letter himself! . . ."

Annette had understood:

"Brigand!" she said to Assia. "And what was in the real letter?"

Assia recited it by heart. The letter revealed, as to an accomplice, a fantastic plan of conspiracy against the government. The pseudo-conspirator was requested to send his comrades (here followed the names of the most prominent anti-Fascist *émigrés*) precise and varied information as to air-defense, aerodromes, guards, militia barracks, etc., etc. Buonamico had not signed the letter.

Marc was silent, stupefied. Assia gloated, without shame.

"Who was right? You little idiot! Are you convinced now about your good friend?"

Marc shrugged his shoulders:

"I have been that long since! I suspected it."

"Papal mule! Did you do it on purpose?"

"I had doubts but no proof. And I thought he might be a traitor and yet have a mother to whom he was still a guileless pitiable son. I despised him and pitied him. . . . But I don't understand."

"What more is there to understand?"

"Just why should he pick me as the one to betray—I who defended him against others (and he knows it!), I but for whom he would have been executed in Paris?"

"He was furious at his failures. He had to bring off an exploit at any price. And you, did you hide your suspicions from him?"

"No," said Marc, "I scorned to."

"Yes, you didn't even do him the honor to be afraid of him. And you are surprised that he avenged himself!"

"My child," said Annette, "you are very quick at seeing the mistakes of others. Why then do you make so many yourself? Would it not have been wiser to save us from the trap than to make the trappers fall into it, and then make fun of them?"

"I have sinned," said Assia. "I sin and I shall sin. I never could resist sin. . . . *Et ne nos inducas*! . . . Revenge is so sweet!"

"He has avenged himself. You have avenged yourself. And whose turn is it now?"

LIV

She did not say that when she had spoken to the banker, over the telephone, of her intention of coming to thank him in Rome, Zara's voice had sounded a little embarrassed and he had not welcomed the proposal. In the evening he had even telephoned again to Annette's hotel. But she had gone out with her children; and when she returned, the porter forgot to tell her; he only remembered next morning, just as the three travelers were about to catch the train for Bologna. There was no time to communicate with Rome. Annette never knew what Zara meant to tell her. And Zara, who had informed himself since their meeting in Switzerland, after hesitating between two courses, one of friendship, the other of prudence, had finally chosen the latter, and kept silence. He was a fatalist, so long as fatalism was conducive to his tranquillity: since luck would have it that he had not been able to get Annette on the telephone the night before, leave it at that! He had done his duty.

Annette would have thought it prudent to go back. This beginning to their trip made her uneasy. But it delighted Assia, who was enchanted at having thus broken the spider's web woven across the doorway. It suited her adventurous temperament. She was more interested in the Italy of the present day than in the museums.

Marc had hastened to brush aside the cloud from his Italian sky; but the incident had repercussions within him which it was not in his power to arrest: this brief personal contact with the police machinery of defense and provocation which protects the flanks of tyranny had made tyranny more intolerably real to him than accounts read

in the newspapers. He had not now the same joy in the air, the sun, the beautiful faces, the golden hands, the healthy and proud *giovinezza*, the flowers, fruit, and gaudily painted churches. He perceived a sickly odor of lagoons in the cloying glances of the holy babes and semi-virgins of Gaudenzio and Luini, and in the coquettish smiles of Vinci's androgynes. He did not perceive the serene bitterness of the humiliated spirit which, in the days of the Moor, as in those of the *Duce*, avenges itself against the tyrant by irony and dreams. He would have thought them the ruses of prostituted slaves. He saw the shadow of the wings of the bird of prey darken the sun.

The shadow covered the plains of Lombardy. Timid souls hid themselves, with heads under their wings, or cackled, feigning to forget their servitude and the suspended menace. The few friends of Annette and Count Chiarenza whom they visited in Milan appeared painfully embarrassed at receiving them; they seemed to fear the words which might fall from their visitors' lips, and hastened to talk very loud, with excessive animation upon trivial matters. Some, rather braver, were bold enough to admit their guests to the furthest room in their apartments, after passing through two or three others; and there behind closed doors, after making sure once more that no one was listening in the next room, they showed a troubled countenance. They seemed to be asking pardon. They murmured: "One can't talk . . ." They were visibly overwhelmed with shame. They could no longer be sure even of their own children, enrolled from the age of ten, and trained to smell out and denounce the quarry. Worst of all (they admitted it) was the abject fear that weighed upon a part of Italy, and the constraint of not saying what one thought; the daily lie

of words, gestures, and looks insinuated itself into the soul, like a degrading habit; the purest felt the taint with sorrow, and in moments of intimacy were obviously quivering and tormented. An unappeasable fury lay beneath, but its limbs were broken. In charity, they stuffed its mouth with earth:

"Choke, and die! . . ."

There were plenty of other Italians who cheerfully adapted themselves to the new order, bought at the price of liberty. There are two different temperaments. Even among the individualist peoples of the South, there are two irreducible and perpetually opposed kinds of individualism: some want liberty, at any price; others prefer the Cæsarean order, provided that individual pride can profit by it. These latter are the majority: without sufficient reason to be proud of themselves alone, stark naked, destitute of any mind of their own, or means of action, they are relieved that a master or a State should think for them, and act through them, and are cheered to be associated with that power and its promises of glory. Every particle swells and becomes a mass, or so deludes itself, like the frog in the likeness of the bull; when the bull bellows, the bellows swell the frog with pride. What they are not, what they cannot be, what they dream of being, they flatter themselves that they have become by a blank power of attorney handed over to the dictator, or the State. And they kiss the boots of the Cæsar, real or made of cardboard, who keeps up the fiction of the bundle in which each of the separate weaknesses bound together believes that it represents the strength of the whole . . . *L'Etat c'est moi* . . . Poor things! And in the meanwhile, the *corporative* State is swallowing the corporations, associations, and citizens in wholesale and retail lots. The bundle belongs to the fist. *Suum*

cuique . . . For some, to have. For the others, let them be had! . . . They are *had!* . . .

They were proud of it. Proud of that fist. And, in spite of all, everywhere, hope (no matter which! to build, or to destroy . . .) burst forth from that beautiful fertile race, whose inexhaustible vitality lifts it above thoughts of despair, and above its fields of fever and sterility. Those young men, with bodies castrated of their free souls, seemed all the healthier for it; they overflowed with animal joy, and their overheated pride blazed up. The wind of the *Duce* blew the flames and smoke like a sirocco. Under the plume of the volcano, the *giovinezza* gathers in the grapes! But perhaps youth itself will be the vintage. Who will drink it? . . .

Marc's joy was spoiled. He could not bear the sight of this stage-managed scene of a young Empire, the conscripted gayety of that youth which no longer felt the value of liberty, that façade of constructions with no main building behind it, that show of works exhibited to foreigners. He suspected the emptiness of soul that lay beneath it. He felt that the fevers and miseries of that world were his own. That dear Italy, he clasped her with the ardor of a young lover; it pained him to see her subjected and humiliated; and it hurt worse still that she had fallen so low as not to feel her humiliation!

Assia said, as she lovingly caressed his forehead, eyes, and mouth, in bed:

"It's not your fault, my darling! Don't fret yourself over it! You seem to be as angry with her as you were with me . . ."

She thought: "When I was false to you." She did not say it. But Marc's start showed that he had understood. She entwined herself:

"Pardon," she whispered, "pardon for her and for me! . . ."

Marc clasped her:

"I love you better than before. But I am sad, for her, for you, for myself, and for all that has been."

"I'm not," said Assia. "If you love me better (and I love you better) than before, I rejoice for what has been."

"Do you really dare?" said Marc.

"I dare. And you dare too!" said Assia, biting his neck. "We are not white geese bewailing themselves because they have soiled the tips of their wings. We are wild ducks who will fly only the higher for having plunged into the river. Love your duck! And love this other (I allow you), this Italy who with her long swan's neck buried in the mud shows the heavens her black rump, like a triumphal tiara. When it has eaten enough mud, the long neck will emerge from the bottom, and the great bird will be right side up again; then it will float all the better on its sea—'*mare nostro*' . . . There is time for everything: for the mud bath, and the wind bath. Italy will do as I have done. I am washed clean of mud. I have had my bath. And I clasp you. Say that I smell of good sea air."

"You are the entwining siren," said Marc, enlaced and enlacing her, "even your mud smells of seaweed."

By her assurance, she restored his joy and confidence in life. No, it was not possible that this Italy, this land of gods and heroes, could be as it was represented in the press owned by the bosses, or as it was shown on this stage prepared for the *Duce's* scenario. Beneath the silence of gagged mouths, we know well that there are some of the freest souls, like our Count Chiarenza. We know of some among the living, whom we will not name, mentioning only the sacrificed immortals, Anendola, Mat-

teotti, and Lauro,[1] brothers of Icarus. The black tyrants and the simoniacal priests, whom Dante, fierce as they, breathing forth his diamond genius in hate as well as in love, has tortured in his hell, were born of the same earth on which were scattered the roses of Assisi and the blood of St. Francis. The abject plebeians who tore the noble victims of the Bourbons to pieces, as in the circus games, were brothers to the martyrs of the *Risorgimento* and to the most humane people in the world. That holy land is ever, to our love, the land of the apostle of the rights of the people: Mazzini. Our Mazzini still lives in the hearts of those among the oppressed whom the oppressor will never bend. It was enough for Marc to meet even one, a young friend of Count Bruno's, his *alter ego* in the crippled work of the *Mezzogiorno*, who quoted, with a sad proud smile, the heroic words of Euphorion:

"An impregnable fortress is man's breast of tempered steel." [2]

Marc acquired an inward conviction that all the assaults of tyranny would shatter themselves against it. *"Credo"* . . . I believe! . . . I believe that Italy will rise again. I believe in truth and in life.

Assia said:

"We are whole. The world is whole. The unwholesome dies. The whole live, the whole will conquer. And we will help them, my dear! We are both enrolled in the great army of sweepers. To-morrow clear for action! Every man will sweep before his own door. And if there is a stench before other doors, if these *lazzaroni* are too slow in setting about it, we will sweep before their door! If they do not deliver themselves, we will make them

[1] Lauro de Bosis.

[2] Goethe: *Faust, Part II.*

free . . . And meanwhile, great lazybones, stir your stumps! And with all our might (joy is might), let us take joy!"

"I take *my* joy," said Marc, taking her.

LV

Joy returned. And for all the rest of the journey it dwelt within him. Between the two enchantresses, Assia the cat and the Italian *Primavera*, no room was left for care. And why burden oneself with care, since one knows what one will do? It is decided—we will act to-morrow! There is nothing to do but await the morrow. The morrow will come. And light of heart, with conscience at rest, let our beaks peck at and enjoy the last hours of to-day.

The three beaks enjoyed them. Never did starlings in a vineyard show a better appetite. They had been so long deprived of the golden fruit! Marc had never known it. This was the first time he had ever been out of northern France. He said, with tears in his eyes:

"So it was true? Beauty really does exist on earth!"

Assia laughed:

"Flattering for us!"

Marc, abashed, excused himself:

"No, I did not mean that: you, I did not mean you: you two. You, you are myself, I cannot see you now. I mean: all this, all this around us . . ." (He pointed to earth and sky.)

"All right, my love, don't apologize!" said Assia. "I know very well that even if I were ten times as ugly as I am, you would love me better than the loveliest. You can't help it! For you hold me and I hold you. So feast your eyes to the full! Your Assia is not jealous. And, if you feel like it, you may even kiss the lips of one of these girls with blazing eyes who carry baskets on their heads, and walk the road like Victories, whose firm

breasts are borne for bucklers on ships' prows! You will bring the taste of orange back to me . . ."

She added:

"Or of onion . . . It doesn't matter! I am not jealous of a fruit. Your mouth is mine! Gladden your mouth! Everything is mine!"

Their joy increased as they advanced into Italy. It had its full moon, after they had crossed the Apennines. The two women had anticipated Marc's emotion when he first set foot in Florence. It surpassed their expectation. Marc lost his breath when he found himself shut in, in the narrow streets with their large flagstones, between the implacable walls of the high palaces, and saw rising up, piercing the sky, the bare sword of the tower of the Signoria. His first feeling was fear, but he did not express it. The blow of the dagger. His legs gave; he leaned against the wall. Then, like the spurt of blood from the wound, admiration burst forth in cries. His companions were laughing; they saw nothing but beauty. Of the *Quattro cento* of massacres, of death in ambush at every corner, their eyes saw nothing but the robe of art, and the fine proud coat of arms, the *Armeria*, from which the centuries, those guardians of museums, had rubbed the stains of blood. But Marc, good dog, smelt its rust at once. Blood is blood. It is ageless. Was it that of *Matteotti?* . . . At the corner of the square, Annette showed him the spot where God's scapegoat, Savonarola, was burned. . . . And there, the hooks, like those of a butcher's stall, in the façade of the black palace, on which were hung the heads and quarters of conspirators . . . And on the walls, and in the churches, those *Duci*, the *condottieri*, the great butchers . . . And these women laughed, as laugh the fair girls, long of limb, swaying like reeds, with heads too heavy for their bodies, in the

frescoes and paintings in the museums. And Marc laughed. He laughed too . . . Life is beautiful. One forgives it for being cruel, when heaven places on its brow, as on the tops of the stern palaces, its crown of violets. And beneath that brow bloom those eyes, ardent as mouths. And in those mouths the melodious Tuscan speech . . . And to complete the intoxication of the sky, art, and beautiful bodies, a good meal washed down by a cool and heady flask of Chianti . . . Marc was not an abstainer. Neither were his companions, daughters of Noah. They gave thanks to all that is good . . .

But if, when they returned at night, their heads were dancing, it was because their eyes had drunk, much more than their throats, the shining light of the day. And in their communicating rooms, they left the door open and continued chattering from one bed to the other, the mother hen and her ducks, until sleep overcame them. But sometimes in the middle of the night, Annette would get up (she soon had enough of sleep) and walk noiselessly to the window, with bare feet, to drink in the marvelous starry sky. She would remain there for hours in dreamy ecstasy, till dawn and cold sent her shivering back to bed.

One night, her Marc joined her. It was the eve of their departure. They were going on to Rome next day. Five days in the Eternal City. Then home . . . Marc drew near, unperceived. She started, and precipitately began to excuse herself. She said:

"Don't scold me! It is a sin to sleep on such nights when one has such a little time left to live."

He did not protest, as one does in such cases, out of politeness. He did not say: "You have not got such a little, you have got lots . . ." He said:

"That's true."

(She remembered it the following night.)

But he had gone to fetch a coat, and tenderly put it round his mother's shoulders. Then she felt the coolness of the night; and she shivered. He took her hand, and they stayed there contemplating the night and their thoughts. From the window, on the top story, they could see the roofs of Florence, and emerging, the Campanile and the squat Duomo, buttressed on its drums, like a monstrous insect about to jump. The murmur of fountains rose from below; and like cocks, the clocks every quarter passed on the watchword to each other, indefatigably recalling the flight of time. Infrequent footsteps sounded on the flagstones. And from the next room (Annette and Marc smiled) came Assia's decided little snore. Annette asked her son:

"My big brother, are you happy now?"

He said:

"Big sister, thank you!"

"Thank me, what for?"

"For having given me life."

Her heart was inundated with joy.

"Then, all said and done, you do not regret the adventure?"

"The adventure of being a man?" he asked. "No. All said and done, miseries, and shames, and cruelties, and death at the end, it is worth while living! . . . *Dimicandum* . . . It's fine, it's good. . . ."

"With peace at heart."

"Peace in warfare. And good companions in arms like these two."

He pointed to the one who slept, and put his arm round the other. Annette said:

"The two others will carry the one who falls to the goal."

(She was thinking of herself.)

Marc said:

"Promised! The one who conquers, conquers for the three."

Annette said proudly:

"For all."

Marc laughed for joy. And he kissed Annette impulsively, and she returned his embrace.

A patter of bare feet. A mocking voice whispering:

"Caught in the act!"

And two paws dug their pincers into the fat part of their backs. It was the cat; Assia said—

"What a disgrace! Mother Annette debauching my husband for me. Rake! Just you come back to my bed!"

But they took her between them, wrapped in the same shepherd's coat. Assia teased first one, and then the other, and both tickled her . . . But they stood still, watching the fleet footsteps of the dawn, which seemed to run over the roofs. Darkness fled into the corners. And suddenly the dagger of a cross surmounting a dome flamed with a ray of gold. The day had entered by assault.

LVI

It was fairly late when they left the hotel. They had meant to make the most of this last day. But they had fallen asleep when they went back to bed, and they overslept themselves. Marc and Assia, waking in each other's arms, were startled to hear a clock strike eleven. But "all said and done," as the mother said, they did not think it was time wasted.

Annette had not waited for them. She had left a note on her table giving them a rendezvous inside the Duomo, a little before noon. They searched there, and found her, at last, in the darkest corner, in the shadow of the high altar, before the tragic *Descent from the Cross*. Among all Michelangelo's works, this one by an invincible attraction had touched Annette's heart the most; and she had come to say good-by to it. They dragged her off. Assia had little taste for Michelangelo (she had little enough for art), and she stuck out her lip disdainfully to show her aversion for these stone larvæ, wrapped in semi-darkness, as in a spider's web. And the spider was up there, lurking with enormous tentacles, at the top of the well of the cupola.

"Woof! Let's get out!" said Assia, leading them off high-handedly. She never felt at ease under that tense God, spying on all below.

"The devil doesn't like holy water," said Marc.

"I like free water," said Assia, "water of the earth, in the sunshine. Let who will drink the holy water out of foot baths."

"And you like the water of the vine still better."

"It's God's blood," said the she-devil, showing off. "Let's go and booze."

They went off gayly to lunch. They had chosen a *trattoria* near the Arno. On the way, Assia teased Annette about her taste for shadow and devotion. She said that if she had known it sooner she would never have taken up with such a woman. Annette said that shadow was necessary in order better to enjoy light.

"And sorrow to savor joy . . . I know the anthem," retorted Assia. "'*Durch Leiden Freude*' . . . Thank you! I'll stick to joy undashed with water, like pure wine. My head is strong enough to stand it. I want no tears in my glass. My Marc undiluted . . ."

"Your Marc, your Marc! Monopolizer! Share and share alike! He came from my vat!"

"And where do I come in, in all this?" protested Marc. "It's ridiculous! Shut up, the pair of you! I am quite willing to be drunk and eaten, but, at least, let it be by humanity's great mass."

"I am humanity," said the glutton. But she added: "We joke, darling, but you are right. And that is why we love you. I am not a monopolizer. I want my Marc to be for all. Let those who are hungry eat you! And let's all three be drunk and eaten together!"

At the Ponte Vecchio, the two women stopped to buy souvenirs in the shops. Mosaics and bindings. Assia wanted some coral horns, to turn away the evil eye. Though she laughed at it, it is not at all certain that she did not believe in it, in the depths of her muddled soul. Of religion, not a trace left! But superstitions as many as you like! It was a game. And to play well, one must be caught by the game. While she ferreted in the boxes, she did not see that the evil eye was hovering round her. Marc, whose eyes were not following his fingers, as were

hers, noticed some blackshirts at the entrance to the bridge, some young men on the watch, several of whom were making their rounds; they scrutinized him, as they passed behind his back. He caught glances between two of them designating him. He said nothing about it to his companions. At any other time, Assia would have been quicker than he to see and perhaps to recognize: for it was not the first time that such figures had crossed their path. But the coral fetishes, like gods of another clan, held her eyes, and led her into the trap.

Having made their purchases, the two women, and Marc, returned to the entrance of the bridge; and they had just passed the group of watchmen who had scrutinized Marc, when Assia, who was chattering about her baubles, stopped short and looked back, after they had passed: she thought she had seen (illusion!) the old man of Lugano, Buonamico's confidant, passing in a taxi; and her eyes followed the taxi, which stopped a few paces off; she watched. But no one got out, and while she was looking behind, the *jettatura* deceived her again, and ill luck came from in front . . .

They were just entering upon the quay of Lungarno Acciajoli, when round a corner there came an old man with a gray beard, slightly bent, with the nervous emaciated features of an intellectual, and short-sighted eyes behind glasses. He cast anxious troubled glances round him, as he walked. He was preceded by a lad of fourteen or fifteen, whose quick eyes sighted the blackbirds in ambush an instant before they pounced. He drew back, with a cry, towards his father, trying to drag him to the door of a house. But the whole band fell upon them with a shout. In an instant the boy was flung ten paces and rolled on the ground. The old man was surrounded, struck in the face, his glasses broken on his

eyes, kicked in the stomach; he doubled up, then staggered back howling. One of the assailants, shouting, raised his bludgeon. The boy, who had got up, flung himself before his father to ward off the blow, received the bludgeon on his raised arm which cracked like a piece of stick, fell, was savagely trampled on and dragged by the neck towards the river bank, like a dog being thrown into the water.

All this tumult had flashed by at full speed like a sound film, before Assia had time to turn her attention to Marc. When she thought of it, Marc had sprung forward.

Their group of three was left alone on the pavement. All the passers-by had fled in fear, or watched in hiding, from afar. A superior officer, an old man decorated with medals, passed in a car near the killers; the child called for help, but the officer turned his eyes away, and the chauffeur drove faster. Marc cried: "Cowards!"

His heart had bounded forward before he did. Before he knew what he was about, he found himself in the midst of the black band, which he pierced like a bullet. He tore the boy, half of whose body was already hanging over the parapet, from their clutches. But not for long. . . . Almost immediately he dropped the rescued prey on the pavement, and sank down, clasping both hands on his left breast. A tall Fascist, towering half a head above him, (the very one who had scrutinized him), with fierce jaws, had plunged his knife into him up to the hilt with both hands. The two women saw the blow. Annette staggered, as if she had received it. Assia leapt like a panther on her boy, to defend him; and her ten nails plowed the odious face of the butcher, clawing at his eyes. The onlookers expected to see her killed. . . . But the unexpected happened. A man who was watching the scene at a distance, and seemed to be directing it, sprang forward, in his turn.

A few words were enough. In an instant the whole band dispersed. There was empty space round Marc and Assia. They were alone beneath the sun. . . . And that crowd, now gathered at thirty paces off, watching! . . .

Marc was dead. At the first blow. His hands clasped on his heart. The stream of blood trickled between his fingers. Head thrown back on the pavement, his open eyes, now sightless, held graven, under the curtain of blood, the Tuscan sky.

Fifteen paces away, Annette stood alone, paralyzed, looking on him with staring eyes, breathless, stretching out her arms. Her breath came back but she panted like a broken bellows. The crowd behind her could hear her. But not one came forward to support the mother. She had begun to walk towards her son. But her legs were like stone. Every step cost a superhuman effort.

She reached Assia leaning over the well beloved as he lay in his blood. She put her aside. She sat down in the blood. She took the dead son in her arms, she clasped him, she laid him on her knees. And suddenly, full life and, with life, sorrow flowed back to her, like the thawing of a river. With her face raised towards the implacable, towards the empty sky, she cried aloud, like a Corsican "*vocifératrice.*" The silent crowd, in their turn, gasped with emotion. But with the majority, the emotion was theatrical. Assia, taken aback, had suspended her sobs, to listen to the *lamento*. The mother called the son:

"Come back, come back! Don't go away, my boy! . . ."

She implored him, she demanded him of the other *Mothers*, the unfathomable sources of Life; she would have gone to seek him there, like Orpheus. She kissed him, she put her mouth to the hole of blood, the fountain of his breast. And the heart-rending threnody issued

from her bloodstained mouth. But not a tear fell from her eyes.

Then the police came upon the scene. In a few minutes, the crowd was swept beyond the bridge; traffic was held up at the four street corners; and from the Via Por S. Maria came a taxi at full speed, and stopped beside the two women, and the body. The man who had seemed to direct the whole scene got out. Head bared, with a formal solemn air and official condolences, he approached Annette, and at a sign from him two other men bent down to lift the body. . . . Then the *lamento* stopped short. Annette gazing full at the "enemy," put him aside. She heard her own voice rolling away in the distance; and she recognized the savage baying of Sylvie, howling on the pavement of Paris, where her daughter lay killed.[1] . . . A terrible calm came over her. Not a word more. She got up. Her glance summoned Assia. With her help she raised the son, the lover, the beloved. She took the shoulders, Assia the legs. Without a look at the men offering their help, repulsing them, she carried the body to the taxi. She laid it down. Assia got in. As she was about to get in herself, she perceived at a little distance, behind the wall of police, the old man and the boy who had been attacked, for whom her son had died. They were gazing at her with eyes like beaten dogs, bloodstained and muddy, asking pardon. She bowed to them gravely. Her tragic calm seemed to say:

"All is well."

The taxi started.

Inside the hotel, not a face to be seen on the way, or on the stairs; the police had cleared the place. In the room under the roof, where she had watched the daybreak with

[1] "Summer."

her son, and where the murderous sun was now beating in, Annette washed the body, bandaged it, and dressed it; she would allow no other hand to come in contact with the sacred flesh. Save Assia. . . . But Assia was no help. Though used to death, she succumbed beneath the blow. She could not look upon the body of the beloved without falling upon it with sobs and furious kisses. Annette shut her in the next room while she finished the funereal toilet. And afterwards, when she opened the door, she found her prostrate on the threshold. She laid Assia fully dressed on the bed. Assia, unconscious, let her have her way. She had alternate fits of torpor and fury.

Silence was about the rooms. Everything had been arranged to seal it hermetically between the two women and the outside world. No visits. Strict watch was kept that no one should have speech with them. The two escaped victims of the attack, father and son, tried in vain to come and speak their gratitude, but to no avail. The matter was hushed up in the press. The legal medical officer came for form's sake. Towards the end of the day the Italian authorities also appeared; they presented their condolences. Annette received them with her head high, calm and severe; she had the strength to betray nothing of her feelings. Assia had been obliged to hide in the other room, in order not to show her fury; she flung herself upon her bed, biting it. The French Consulate also put in a tardy appearance. They took down the depositions, consulted with Annette about the coffin, the removal of the body, and their departure. She would have wished not to remain there a day longer. But the formalities detained her till the following evening.

She was obliged to spend the night in the murderous city, the city of stone which has lapped the blood of the murdered for so many centuries. (And it is from that

blood that the flower of art has sprung. . . . At that moment Annette could have trampled on that flower! . . .) Assia wanted to watch with her; kneeling at the feet of the dead, kissing them, she murmured an incoherent lament, now rising, and now breaking off; in the end she sank into the darkness of the mind, unconscious, her cheek resting against Marc's bare foot. Annette sat bending forwards, her dry eyes staring into the gulf. Darkness everywhere; above, below; darkness, outside; darkness, within. Black wings bore her, soaring to the center. She herself was Darkness.

The light returned. A new era . . . *Post mortem* . . . A strange sun which her eyes had never known. Annette now belonged to another age.

But it was not the time to shut her eyes and lie down, like him, beside him, with hands joined in the hollow of the breast. There were duties to be fulfilled. She attended to her toilet, dressed herself again; she saw to it that Assia against her will took some nourishment. She forced it on her. Assia refused it, ate, wept, ate her tears and her meal. At the end, she retched and brought it up again. The double coffin was brought very early, and they sealed up the leaden prison. Assia fled into the passage, like a madwoman, stopping her ears with her hands. Annette refused to go away; she watched them walling up her child. She said to him, silently:

"Don't be afraid! I am here, my boy . . ."

After that the three were left alone. Shutters were closed all the day. They never moved. Son, mother, and wife. The three lay stretched out. Annette had Assia, who could not be alone, beside her on her bed; she held her hand; side by side, they lay full length on their backs. Assia, stupefied by grief, grew drowsy with the noise of the street, or was troubled at the sinister buzzing of a large fly in the room. Annette squeezed her hand tighter. With wide eyes, fixed unseeingly on the ceiling, Annette went over all her life with Marc.

The train left after eleven o'clock that night. The two women found the French Consul, who had taken them under his care, on the platform, and he did not leave them till he had seen them off. They had a reserved compartment. Leaning out of the window to say good-by, Annette again caught sight of the boy with a broken arm, whom Marc's intervention had saved, outside the barrier. He had managed to reach the platform, but they kept him away from the carriage. Annette beckoned to him, and told the Consul that she wished to speak to him. The official very reluctantly let him pass, and the lad rushed to the step of the carriage and kissed Annette's hand, with tears. He volubly uttered words which Annette could not understand; but they had no need of words. Annette, freeing her hand, placed it on the boy's head, and said, aloud, so that all present could hear it, that she recommended him to the care of the authorities; and she begged the Consul to let her know, later, what became of him. She wanted, as far as possible, to prevent any vengeance coming into play after her departure.

The engine whistled. The authorities did not wish that the scene should be prolonged. Annette sat down, in her mourning veils. And the funeral train disappeared into the night.

L'ANNONCIATRICE (ANNA NUNCIA)

PART III

LVII

SYLVIE was not very well just then. She had not been well for a long time. But that morning she was prostrate. A dead weight hung on her limbs. She found it difficult to get up. Where was the quicksilver of her bygone dawns, when, her eyes scarcely opened, the spirit bounded out of sleep, and in one movement threw the sheets back and the bare legs out of bed, the hardy little feet immediately beginning to wriggle their big toes on the carpet? Today she got up, to sit down limp and breathless, wet with perspiration and shivering, without enough energy even to slip off a pair of pyjamas. It cost her a great effort and several attempts to get herself dressed. Will rather than physical strength was lacking. For each of her movements that used to follow each other mechanically, without attention, now required an effort of will. The arm raised to her hair fell back, or stuck still, unless she said every instant:

"Now then, get on with it!"

It was tiring. And all of a sudden, at the least effort, this breathlessness . . . She looked at her sallow complexion in the glass, and the tangle of hair in her comb (how it was coming out!). It was going gray at the temples. She smiled, a smile of scornful pity. She recovered her energy in the harsh judgment she passed upon that old rag of a body, the poor threadbare stuff. She brutally examined the slackened texture. And as her hand felt her stomach, she had a sharp pain, as if a knife had been plunged in. She sank down, naked, on the edge of the

bath, bent double, both hands pressed on the wound. The pain disappeared as it sank in. But Sylvie sat on, in the same position, following its passage into her body. She drew herself up, at last, passing her hand down her left thigh, a little swollen round the knee: the skin was very white, smooth and tense; and the whole leg heavy as a piece of stone. This was, no doubt, the cause of her lassitude. But the lassitude would not have mattered, but for the distress that seized her, at that moment. She could not account for it. No reason whatever. Things were going as they should. She was getting old. Her strength, her health, her life, were giving her the slip. She knew why! When you know why, when you know that if you are worn out, you are worn out of your own free will through too much enjoyment, you don't complain: you have had your money's worth. Sylvie did not haggle over what was worth its price, any more than she let others haggle with her in business. A good payer! . . . Then why this despondency?

She never stirred out all day. The flat was deserted. Bernadette and her husband had taken advantage of the Whitsun holiday for a few days' motor trip to Bayonne in their car. Sylvie sat listless before an open drawer, tidying it, dropping old letters, and forgetting herself in dreaming over a line. Her forehead ached between the eyebrows. The pain kept her company. The long empty day went by. Sylvie recovered herself to find it nearly nightfall. She must have dozed now and then. She felt an anxious regret that the time had gone by so quickly. She would have liked to hold it back.

The evening papers were brought to her. She opened them leisurely. Her eyes carelessly skimmed the news items. Among the late news, five brief lines:

"Frenchman assassinated in Florence. . . ."

She did not read (she thought she had not read) beyond the first line. She did not linger over it. She put out the light: so tired that she left the paper open on the bed . . . Sleep . . . The den of the formless . . . Or is that formlessness but the instantaneous oblivion of forms that succeed each other, harassing and unceasing? It is like being tied up in a sack and flung into the void, without air or light; with no hands, no breath, and no eyes . . . She tried to wrench herself free, making the sack strings crack, and fell back, exhausted, for hours. . . .

When she managed to escape, at last, she switched on the light, and saw that midnight had not struck; she had slept less than an hour. An intolerable anguish gripped her by the throat. She picked up a book on the table and tried to read. Her glance fell on the newspaper on the bed. She took it up again, and without consciously seeking it, found the lines again about "*the Frenchman in Florence,*" read on—"Ribière . . ." felt a pang at her heart . . . (she realized then that she must have read the name, the first time) . . . stopped, the paper in her hand, spelling out the letters . . . It was certainly "Ribière . . . killed on the banks of the Arno in a quarrel with Black Shirts . . ." She shrugged her shoulders, threw down the paper, put out the light again, and tried to make her mind dark too. What on earth was she thinking?

"Idiot! . . . What will you invent next? . . ." That was certainly a "*b.*" . . . She turned over on her pillow. . . . All the same it was reassuring to know that her nephew and sister were in Switzerland. . . . Thank God! She had to repeat it to herself several times that night. Reason was convinced. Instinct was not. She would not admit to herself that she held her breath every time she heard a footstep on the stairs.

Morning came again, and she had not slept. But she breathed more freely. No telegram had come. Bad news always travels swiftly.

There was no telegram—only a postcard. It was a good one. Some good news is more terrible than the worst. The postmark was "*Florence*" and the postcard was from Marc! . . . A wave of blood passed before Sylvie's eyes. And the pain in her stomach stabbed her again. . . . She struggled in a mist. She wanted to read. She had to wait till the wave receded. Her hands were trembling. . . .

Marc was writing. So he was alive. What date? . . . The day before yesterday. Marc was gay, tender, and malicious. He joked familiarly with his old friend. He sent her a picture postcard of Crivelli's *Madonna with the Candle* in the Brera Museum. The fair lady, fresh and healthy, with clear-cut fine features, rather dry, with a decided pout, sits enthroned, sumptuous and rustic, under a canopy garlanded with fruit; and her beautiful robust hand, with its long fingers, holds out a pear to the child.

And the urchin (he of Paris) wrote:

"Do you recognize yourself?"

(And it was true, it was like her; as she used to be! So he still saw her like that?)

And he added:

"And all your victories round your throne. Aren't they juicy, all those pears! . . . And the little candle at your feet, that's me."

(The dear scamp! He was writing on an open card . . .)

And he went on:

"No! don't put on your angry chin! Pardon! I am mad! This golden sun makes me tipsy. And everything one sees, these old stones, these young flowers, these beautiful girls of bygone days and of to-day. Ah! How lovely it is! How good to be alive! My dear old girl, why aren't you with us? How I miss you! When I saw you in the picture, I nearly embraced the Madonna. But I didn't tell Assia that . . . Hold out your chin! . . ."

Yes, he must have been drunk, the lunatic, a sunstroke too many. How young he was! How young one felt again listening to him! . . . Sylvie, laughing, held out her chin; and she kissed the lines on the postcard.

Then darkness and anguish once more . . . She compared the day and time of the postcard with the news items.

"No! Impossible! . . . It is a crime even to think of it! . . . As if I shouldn't have heard twenty times, since yesterday morning? You old fool! . . ."

LVIII

But, the next moment, she was out of bed and dressing hastily, with feverish fingers which, for the first time, made mistakes with the fastenings. And without taking time to swallow her coffee (it was a rite on rising) she went out, putting the postcard from Florence in her bosom, next to her skin . . . "Mad" she certainly was. For in spite of the menace of her swollen leg (she was an expert in sickness, she knew what it meant), she intended to go on foot to the top of the hill of Montmartre, to pray in the Basilica. It was a vow. She climbed, clenching her teeth, dragging that cannon ball after her, and in the end lifting her leg with her hands from step to step—she climbed up the two hundred and twenty-five steps. She would have gone up on her knees, but that she was afraid that she would not have been able to get on her feet again. She arrived exhausted. She sank down upon a prie-dieu, before a statue of the Virgin. She prayed, prayed. But she could not succeed in reeling off her prayers. She broke the thread. In the midst of them a monotonous, insistent, impervious affirmation fell from her lips:

"He lives, he lives, he lives . . . I will him to live! . . ."

She wanted to impose this wish on the Divinity. She repeated it to exhaustion. And then she had to stop for a moment, to get her breath. And she found herself with empty brain, and a dry heart. She raised her eyes to the Madonna bending above her, and she remembered the other, the one who was her own portrait. She never gave a moment's thought to the impiety of the comparison.

She spoke to her, as equal to equal, as to her own image in the glass. She said:

"I will it. I will it," as if she had been in the other's place on the pedestal. But the other remained sad and resigned, with open hands. . . . *She did not will it!* . . . Sylvie grumbled at her feet, her rage rising. She took up her hasty murmur again; she kept it up:

"He lives. He lives. . . ."

She tried to bribe God. She promised Him a sum of money—and then senseless things, penances with piety, or without piety, physical and moral impositions that rhymed with nothing, incongruous penalties and torments. What possible use could they be to God? . . . This thought occurred, and she said:

"But what do I know about it? You tell me! I will do anything you like."

And she sank into an abyss of humility made to order. But she touched earth, in one fall, and the abyss was not deep. She found herself face to face with her arid soul, her ardent ego, which could not forget itself; and she scratched at them with her nails, to make a flood of faith spring from them which should reach the face of Him who slept, of Him who could and would not;—she scratched so that the flood should force Him to will according to her will. Nothing came forth. And He who slept, slept on.

He was not sleeping. . . . Sylvie felt that He was watching her, under His eyelids. . . . And suddenly, a thunderbolt struck her:

"It is consummated! . . ."

Oh! not by Him, the petrified, the impotent, the dumb! One had only to look upon the pale intercessor, she who had received the prayer, and brought back the answer—her vanquished air, her gesture of defeat:

"I can do nothing! . . ."

"Then, why do people pray to you?"

Sylvie violently pushed back her prie-dieu, and in the movement she made to rise, the prie-dieu fell. But she did not hear the noise or echoes of its fall. She heard in the thunder of her brain the piteous excuse:

"I can do nothing. It is Destiny. . . ."

"And you call yourself God! . . . Liar! Liar! Dog of Destiny! Dog! . . ."

She spoke aloud. Fortunately few devotees were near. They heard nothing but a mumbling, without distinguishing words. . . . The beadle, summoned from a distance by the noise, came up in time to see a furious woman going out, pushing away the chairs in her path.

Sylvie stood once more under the dead sky, above the circle of the dead town. And she went, staggering, down the bitter stairway of the Seven Dolours. There was one more in that hour! . . . She clung to the rail, so as not to roll down. . . . She would reach the bottom soon enough! She knew what awaited her. Strangely enough, she had no further doubt. Yet, in fact she knew no more than when she went up. . . . She knew all! It would have been useless to argue with her. . . . As she went down, her resentment against those above waned. They could not help it, they were vanquished, like herself—like all these poor idiots she saw going up, in their turn, as she had gone up an hour before. She only felt a longing to cry to them:

"Don't go up! Those up there cannot help themselves. How could they possibly help you? You can see that He is dead too, the son of the Woman, their Son up there! . . ."

But as she came down, the last of her strength ebbed with her anger. She dragged herself along.

With untold difficulty she reached her home. In spite of her obstinate pride in never asking help from others, she was obliged to say to the concierge, who was idling on the doorstep:

"Madame Boireau, will you please help me upstairs?"

She heard nothing that the good woman was saying to her. But on the second landing she found George waiting for her. She was sure of it.

George was in black, and weeping. Sylvie did not weep. She said:

"Is that you, George?"

She dismissed Mme. Boireau, who would not have been loath to remain. She said: "Wait till I find my keys," opened the door, went in, and shut it behind them. . . . And when they were alone in her room, and George, no longer restraining her sobs, held out her arms, murmuring:

"Sylvie . . . Sylvie . . ."

Sylvie said:

"Yes, yes, I know. . . ."

She dropped into her armchair, livid, exhausted, with closed eyes, nearly dead.

Then she said:

"Now, tell me!"

LIX

George had received, in Switzerland, a telegram from Annette, asking her to break the news to Sylvie. She had come home, with the child, by the night train. As soon as she arrived, she hastened to Sylvie. But to her amazement, she found Sylvie already prepared, a Sylvie without a start, without a cry, without a tear. Not till she had poured out all the great grief of youth, which is relieved by flowing forth in floods of tears and clamor, did she perceive the lividness of the woman with closed eyes. She was terrified by it. She took Sylvie's ice-cold hands, touched her forehead, felt her heart, and clasped her protectingly. Sylvie was still silent. But she opened her eyes. It was not George she was looking at. Robust George raised her, dragged her to the bed, and then undressed her. George saw the swelling of the lower part of the body, and rightly estimated the danger. While waiting further help, she made a bandage and laid her at full length in the bed. Sylvie submitted, without moving. George tried, in vain, to get a word from her; then sat down beside the bed, to watch her. She did not know what to do, between the child whom she had left at home, and this woman, whom she did not like to leave. Sylvie saw the difficulty. She made an effort to look at George, and said:

"The child is waiting for you. Go back to him!"

"But I can't leave you alone!"

"I'm used to it."

"But what will you do if you should need help?"

"What I have always done: do without it."

"But you must not move."

"I will not move. I will do like *him*."

George shuddered, and her young tears burst forth again. She rubbed her wet cheeks against Sylvie's, and Sylvie tasted the salt at the corners of her mouth. She said:

"You are very lucky to cry! . . . Come, be off! I want to be alone. I will not move till evening. Come back in the evening! I shall go out."

George, who had got up and dried her eyes, protested. . . .

"I shall go out."

George said no. She forbade it. She got angry. . . .

"I shall go out."

George had said that Annette was arriving that night. Sylvie had made up her mind to go and meet her at the station. Argument was useless.

"But you are risking death!"

"And what of it!"

George protested. Sylvie said:

"That's enough! You can come and help me. Or I'll go by myself."

George said no more, and went away.

Sylvie was left lying there alone, and she never stirred all the afternoon. Her body was dead. Her thoughts were with the train at that moment returning, rumbling through Switzerland and France. Her whole being was with Annette. The old love of the two sisters had drawn them together again. And for both it was a salutary diversion from sorrow. Each of them thought:

"Poor woman!"

(Annette: "How will she bear the news without me?")

(Sylvie: "How could she bear the blow without me?")

And in their mourning, each of them was thinking how

she could lighten it for the other. For although they had been long separated in fact, and separated in heart, they were sure that this sorrow belonged equally to both. Together, as it were, they had made this child; they had fed, educated, and shared him; they had no further thought of disputing him. They died together, in his death. How near together they were in his grave!

"Come, let's go to bed, my poor Annette!"

And Sylvie saw, once more, their two young heads touching, as they bent over the cradle.

Towards nightfall, she got up, in spite of the prohibition, went through the clothes in her wardrobe, took a needle and scissors, and adjusted one of her dresses. George came back towards eight o'clock. Since she could do nothing to prevent, she must, at least, do all she could to minimize the danger. She renewed the dressings and bandage, she helped Sylvie to dress. Sylvie took a little mirror and her make-up, from a drawer near her bed; she did not want her looks to make Annette anxious. George, supporting her in her young athlete's arms, took her downstairs. A taxi took them to the station.

The Simplon train was punctual, as kings (so they say) and as misfortune. A little after ten, the two waiting women saw the black veils of the two women approaching, in the stream of passengers. The younger kept her face hidden beneath her veil. Annette, her face unveiled, erect, unhurried, had passed her arm through that of her daughter-in-law, but Sylvie's sharp eye saw, at once, that it was not for support; the younger woman was the less steady. Annette recognized Sylvie, at a distance; and though she did not quicken her steps, from that instant her eyes never left her sister's. Sylvie saw those eyes approaching; they were terribly calm, so was the large firmly closed, stern mouth. Annette saw Sylvie's

ravaged face quite clearly; and she was not deceived by her expedients; she noticed the puffiness and pallor under the artificial color. Not a word was uttered as the two sisters embraced; but in that clasp they felt the rending pain of one body. George and Assia mingled their tears. When they changed over, in the short moment that Annette held George in her arms she enquired about Sylvie's health. George whispered the facts hurriedly. Annette went back and put her arm round Sylvie's waist, and as, without showing it, she supported her—for Sylvie, wishing to hide her condition, stiffened herself—she felt under her fingers the quivering of that suffering, stumbling flesh. She took her sister home with her.

The first thing Annette did was to go kiss the sleeping child. She remained alone with him for a few minutes, in the dark room, where a gleam shone through the door left ajar. The child still sleeping, said:

"Good-night, daddy. . . ."

Then, half waking:

"Oh, it's not he, it's mummy Annette."

"It's he, too! Go to sleep, darling!"

He fell asleep again.

Annette, returning to the others, put aside all conversation with a gesture. She said to Sylvie:

"You are going to sleep with me. It's better that you should not go home alone. But we won't talk. Do you promise?"

She left Sylvie to attend to her daughter-in-law whom she forced to take a little food. Assia wept, and would not eat. Annette handed her over to George, who led her away; and George also received instructions for the morrow, the formalities to be gone through for the funeral. As they went away, the two young women, who could not stay the stream of their tears, said to each other:

"How does she manage, how do they both manage, not to cry?"

They were almost revolted by it. But it terrified them too. George said aloud what Assia was thinking:

"My God, my God, it must be hell, not to be able to cry! . . ."

The two sisters were seated on the bed, looking at each other with infinite tenderness. Annette helped Sylvie to undress, and lay down beside her, in the dark. They put their arms round each other. And their strength broke down. The younger squeezed herself against the elder; and the elder clasped the younger. Sylvie moaned first:

"Our poor boy!"

Then, ah! then, the torrent of the heart. . . . The dam broke down. And tears inundated them. No one could see. Not even themselves. But each one drank from the other's face the two burning streams that mingled in one river. . . . A sad river! It was their name and their fate. It was made up of fever, love, and sorrow. But at that moment, it was pure, it was holy. . . . Its stream was stainless. Its current swept away the last traces of selfishness. Neither of them thought of herself, but of the other—"of the poor boy," and of the sister's sorrow. When the worst of the torrent was over, leaving them full of passionate pity, they mutually kissed each other's eyes and nostrils. They wiped and caressed their cheeks and mouths. . . .

Then, Annette disengaged herself from her sister's arms; and both lying full length in bed, side by side, holding each other's hand, as if walking in the dark, the elder explained to the younger. She told briefly, in plain words, of the last day, the fatal moment. Her voice was low,

toneless and slow, she stopped now and then to recover strength, or when her hand felt, in her sister's hand, that her sister's soul begged for mercy. They both reached the end of the story. Silence fell and was prolonged. Sylvie drew her hand away, she bent over her sister's breast and pressed her lips on the spot above the heart. Her rage of the morning was forgotten. Fragments of religious sentences rose from her memory:

"Stabat mater dolorosa . . ."

Annette, lying still, submitted. Yes, she was standing —*stabat*—erect in the darkness. Maternally she stroked her sister's head. Then she said:

"Now, let us rest! It will be a heavy day to-morrow."

They turned their backs, and lay pressed against each other. The same current flowed in them. Neither of them slept. After a long time, far into the night, Sylvie asked, in anguish:

"Where is he? Where is he?"

Annette's voice replied:

"Where are we? . . ."

Their two bodies shuddered, back to back. . . . Was it a minute or an hour later? Sylvie spoke again:

"I don't understand, I don't understand. . . ."

Annette silently pressed her shoulders against her sister's. Like a frightened child, Sylvie asked:

"What is life? What is death?"

Annette said:

"They are the same."

LX

Annette and Assia had decided that Marc should not rest in Paris, but in a little village near the Yvette, where the young couple had spent a few blessed days after the two prodigal children had come home. . . . A very few days! Less than a week . . . (They could not afford themselves a holiday! . . .) but outside of time! . . . Marc had expressed this wish, with little thought of its realization. But Annette and Assia had agreed to give their dear one this last satisfaction. (It was to themselves that they gave it.)

It could not be done without many formalities. But George, hearing of it, and her father quickly made the necessary arrangements. Annette and George went to fetch the body from the station dépôt, and entrain it for its final destination. . . . But Annette was left alone to escort it.

She had carefully examined her sister that morning, and decided that Sylvie must stay in bed until her condition improved. Sylvie tried to rebel. But she gave in, not so much to Annette's will as to the affection she saw in her, and the earnest entreaty in her eyes. No, she had no right to refuse her anything at such a time, or to risk her life, when that life could still be of some use (she saw it) to her elder sister. She thought:

"I do not want to die. She needs me!"

As to Assia, she had had a very high temperature in the night. The doctor was sent for and reserved his diagnosis; he forbade all fatigue. It would be imprudent for her to expose herself to fresh emotions. She wailed

and protested that she wanted to go with Annette. But her subconscious resisted:

"No, no, I will not go! . . ."

She was afraid of the cemetery. Afraid of the very sight of that coffin. Afraid, this woman who had passed through so many fields of death in the war and the revolution! . . . Precisely! She had passed through them. And it was afterwards that their trace had slowly, slowly eaten into the steel. Her nervous system was raw; and the last stroke had broken it. She could not now bear the tête-à-tête of a day with the dead. Even though he was not visible! If she could have seen him, it would have been less terrible. . . . "What I can see is outside of me. What I cannot see, but which is there, besieges me and enters. . . ."

Annette was glad not to insist. It was her wish to be alone; she would not have dared to formulate it. She refused the help of George, who wished to cling to her, but she could not refuse Julien Davy's help.

LXI

A little country cemetery. Above the walls of uneven uncemented stones, with the light showing between, rose the hills of red earth, newly-turned by the plow. In the distance was heard the plowshare striking against the stones, and the plowman, speaking to the horses. Eglantine bloomed in the hedgerows. The air was warm and pure as a young mouth. And all the rest was silence—where the dry earth spattered on the coffin. Annette was there, bending over it, and she listened, and she saw it all, to the end. She said to him:

"I am here. Sleep!"

It seemed to her that she was tucking her child up in his bed. She sent Julien away. She remained there alone, she spent the afternoon sitting beside the grave. She thought:

"My son, my son! . . . How far away you are already! You have got ahead of me. Shall I be able to catch up with you?"

For a kind of illumination made her see the dead like a living man striding swiftly away. And beyond the cemetery wall, her eyes followed the silhouette of a man going across the fields. He climbed the hill; and when he reached the crest the silhouette gradually went down and disappeared on the other side. Annette stretched out her arms to him:

"Wait for me!"

The figure disappeared into the earth. Annette had risen, trembling. But her glance fell upon the grave, and peace came back to her limbs. She sat down again! . . . He was there! . . . Although he had vanished behind

the crest of the hill. The bosom of earth was at hand. The mother would be able to join her son.

"My big boy, my big boy!"

Ah! how he had grown since she bore him in her womb!

"You have got beyond me now. . . . Yesterday, my fruit. To-day, my tree. . . ."

And she looked beyond, where, at the bend of the uphill road, a fine beech spread its branches like wings; beneath it, an old woman with a basket on her back had stopped, near a cross, to take breath. She repeated tenderly:

"My big boy! . . . Support me! I am weak! My grief is so great! . . . I know, I know, I must not, you forbid me . . . Yes, my valiant one, I must be worthy of you now . . . I will be, if you are there. Do not leave me! Hold my hand . . . You shall see that your mother will do you credit. She will hold out, if you help her. Henceforward, you are the father. And I the child. . . . Come, my great son! . . ."

She got up. A fine May rain was falling; it wet her through. It fell on the grave also. It united the son and the mother. It was as if every drop that wetted her neck and shoulders was quenching the thirst of the dead:

"Everything is yours that is mine: water and earth. We go shares. You give me your death, and I give my life. I am not going away. It is you who are going. And I follow you. You are getting ahead of me. . . . Courage, Annette! March on! I am sure that I shall reach the place where my Marc is going! Your old mother will not leave you by the way. We were one. We will be one. . . ."

And as she bent down to caress the wet earth with her

hands, she heard a light hurrying step on the gravel; and turning round she saw a tall slight young woman coming, dressed in mourning, who approached her and said:

"I have come . . . Forgive me! . . . My train was two hours late. . . ."

Annette looked at her, her long face and gray eyes, puckered as if to smile, and suddenly, two round tears fell from them. Annette waited in silence, for she had never seen the woman before. The other said:

"Ruche.[1] He knew me."

Annette said (her sad face lighted up):

"I remember your name. You were a kind hostess to my poor little waif."

Ruche bent down with a sudden impulse (she had retained her supple greyhound spine), and before Annette could stop her she had buried her long face in the damp hands covered with mold. Afterwards, when she drew herself up, her cheeks bore the funereal marks. Her eyes, those of a Chinese of the Loire, blinked to cover her emotion. But Annette had seen into the depths. And opening her arms, she kissed the traces her hands had left on the cheeks—the traces of the son. Ruche, clasping her, felt her back wet through with the rain; she was filially alarmed. She said:

"Mother, you must not stay here any longer. You will catch cold. Let us go back together."

And she threw her plaid over Annette's shoulders. Annette, smiling sadly, said:

"I have many daughters, now."

Ruche said:

"You have none whose love and respect for you is greater than mine."

[1] See "The Death of a World."

Annette, taking her arm, returned from the cemetery, with lagging steps, as if reluctantly; she asked:

"Why have you never told me so before?"

Ruche answered:

"I was in the way. You had others."

"How long is it since you saw my son?"

"Seven years, when we parted in Paris."

"Why, if you were still friends?"

"He got married, and I got married."

She added, hastily:

"But you must not think that there was any secret tie between us! I was never *even* his mistress."

There was regret in that word *even*. Annette's ear perceived it. And Ruche, from whom the word had escaped, tried to recall it:

"I should not like you to think that."

Annette looked at her, as they walked:

"If I thought so, what would it matter?"

Ruche blushed:

"Yes, I am wrong. Well then I say: if you believe it, I wish that it were true."

Annette pressed against her side the nervous hand that held her:

"My frank daughter, it would not make you nearer to me than that mere admission has done."

"Nor me nearer to him, if it had been true. . . . I do not want to hide anything from you. . . . And now it comes back to you: it was his, it is yours, I owe it to you. I should lie if I said that I should feel more regret now, if I had been his mistress. But I should lie also (will you believe me?) if I were not to tell you that as it is (since I was not), it is still more beautiful and dear to me. . . ."

The two women went back through the rain to the little village inn, to wait for the train which was to take Annette

back to Paris. Ruche watched over her. Annette had still several formalities to attend to; she had to see the florist and the marble-cutter about the care of the grave, and she wanted to go back there. Ruche went with her everywhere, helping her with her practical mind.

The rain had ceased. After a long visit to the grave, before returning to the station, the two women took a few steps round the little mound, and sat down in the field, a little above it. Ruche told what Marc had been to her, in the days gone by, and the nights likewise. She spoke with her stark frankness, exact, unveiled, untroubled, unashamed; her story was like a clear drawing, with firm lines and without corrections. Total absence of sentimentality and, in that realistic precision, nothing vulgar, or overemphasized. The narrator's memory was an infallible mirror, but a choice one. Annette bent over it in silence in the midst of her grief, with a pale smile like the sun shining through a rainy day in May, as she visualized the two drifting children, who, in the feverish Paris night, lay talking on the same bed, the hands of each holding the other's feet. Ruche said:

"He saved me. I was sinking. If I am still alive, and everything I am, I owe it to that night and the few days we spent together; to the wisdom and unexpected kindness that I found in your boy. I never told him so. We did not like to show emotion. We were careful to hide our most intimate feelings of gratitude and affection —so that the other should not see them. It would have looked silly. (We saw them, all the same! . . .) But what is buried in good soil grows all the better. The little plant of that night has grown to a tree within my breast. I have it here" (she touched her flat bosom)— "the sacred memory of those moments, and your Marc's feet against my cheek. I kiss his feet. . . ."

And Annette remembered. . . . Another woman, one day in the night of time, had said that. . . .[1] She rested her weary old woman's forehead on the firm palm of the young woman, whose long body had been a pillow to her son.

Then Ruche told about her own life. On returning to the provinces seven years ago, she had married a talented young barrister, Renaud Cordier. She had already borne him three children. In taking her place in bourgeois life once more, she had never any intention of giving up. She made it a point of honor that her house should be well kept; but she did not shut herself up in it. She had put her brains at her husband's service, and her husband at the service of social causes, coöperative societies and syndicates. She had constituted herself his secretary; she collaborated with him; and one felt sure (she did not say so) that she had inspired him, had opened wider horizons to him. This noble-minded man (she said he was better than herself) had accepted her conditions for their union from the start: mutual respect for the individual life of each, mutual confidence, once for all. He had loyally kept his promise. He let her come and go, when and where she liked, travel and visit whom she liked, never asking her to render an account of her actions. It was the best way, with a woman like Ruche. She would never have done the faintest wrong to anyone who gave her full license. And to one who never called her to account, she rendered accounts in full. He knew all her thoughts. And he knew what Marc had been to her. It was he who had said:

"Go, my dear! I would go with you, but I should be in the way."

[1] Annette's song, at the end of "Summer."

Annette thought of the life she had missed with Roger. What she had wanted, and what Roger had refused, these two young people had accomplished, thirty years later. She was so taken up by remembrance that she confused the present with the past, and said:

"Please thank your Roger for me."

Ruche, not understanding, answered:

"Renaud. Error in the knight's name."

She went back to Paris with Annette. It was late. She left her at the door of the house. She refused to stay the night with her. On the pretext that she must get back to Lyons at once, she took the train again that night. There was, in fact, no reason for her to hurry home. But she did not care to meet the woman whom Marc had married. Though she may know she has no rights and pretend to be free from jealousy, a woman is never willingly the friend of the beloved of the man she has held in her bed. She wrote to Annette from Lyons, and the correspondence was faithfully kept up. But later on, when Annette wished to see her, it was necessary to go and seek her in her home.

LXII

The worst was not yet over. In those dreadful days, the mother had been borne up by a flame of passionate heroism, communicated to her by the near presence of her son. So long as his body was there, he was still her companion, even in suffering and death: he spoke to her.

But once home again, she found herself alone. The flame died down, with the superhuman tension of those last days. She was worn out, without strength in herself to keep the passionate illusion alive. And she saw that it was an illusion. Not till then did death commence.

Annette could not breathe in it. Her nature, full of life, had never been able to realize (who ever has realized it?), had never been able to tolerate the approach of nothingness. When she went back in memory to those she had loved most, her father, Germain, she felt herself suspended over the gulf, and knew the horror of it. But her *all* was not then involved; she could escape it.

Now, her *all* had been staked and lost. She suddenly felt the shock of it. She knew full well (what mother does not?) that her son was more to her than life. But that is only the cry of passion. It proves nothing but love, ready to throw itself into the flames to rescue the beloved. It does not take into account the real place of the one we love in our actual existence, and what would remain of life if the beloved were withdrawn from it. Now it suddenly dawned on Annette that *there was nothing left.* The beloved son was *all.*

Even at the height of her maternal passion, she had never suspected it. The flame of her ardent and busy life, perpetually fed, seemed to do without him, and had

often devoured other elements. But he had never been absent from her for a moment. Whether consciously or not, she knew that he was always there, and that she held to him like the flame to the oil in the lamp. The flame may spread to the bed curtains, and to the whole house. But the source is in the lamp. The son was the center of the fire. The rest was but a passing blaze.

Now, when she counted up all that he had been to her, she found nothing in her life of which he had not been the heart. During their thirty years of life together, he had not been absent a single day. And before he was born, she still found him in the depths of her flesh, as her eternal impulse, her object and her goal, her essence, the reason of her existence. . . . *"Love, I have you, I am you, you are myself, we are one. . . ."* All the disappointments of life had not availed to destroy that faith. He was her double, her real self, her best. Whether he wished it or not, whether he loved her or not, whether it was true or not, this was her secret, constant, unformulated act of faith. She expressed it now by the fatal realization that, the son being gone, *there was nothing left.*

All the rest was but the thick foliage of a pellitory, from which the support is suddenly torn. Everything crumbles and returns to dust.

What! No other support? Was she then nothing of herself? She had projected all the best of her strength, of her hopes, into that second self. She had none left for the first. Wrongly? Perhaps. But how avoid it, when one is a born mother, and a whole lifetime has indissolubly intertwined you with the son? What others can help you to readjust the pieces? Even Sylvie had never, save for a few brief moments, shared with Annette the secrets of that life, of which Marc alone had eaten the daily bread. And all the rest were newcomers. George's

affection had only been given to Annette in the last three or four years: all the preceding life was to her an unknown world. And in that world Annette could no longer find a living being. That world had become a desert.

The child Vania was certainly a beginning over again of the son. But to begin that life over again from the beginning, one has no longer the courage or the physical strength! And when one knows against what all that upward climb has just been shattered, how find the breath to climb again, a second time?

There remains the illusory consolation of saying to yourself: "My beloved is not dead. He is with me still. . . ." Annette had said it in the first days of the intoxication of grief. But intoxication is fleeting. And what remains is falsehood. In vain does one repeat: "He is here, with me. . . ." One knows very well that he is not! Idealistic illusion is not enough for a strong nature, for one so carnal as Annette's. Unless by sinking into hallucination. And that she would not do. She was too sane, and too true. She had a horror of surrendering herself to the madness that ever hovers on the threshold—even (and all the more) when that madness whispers to her:—"Come! I will console you." She heard:—"I will lie! We will tell lies together. . . ."—Never! To her it would mean sullying her mourning and her dead. She owed it to him to be true, as he was. Thus she stood alone facing him and his gulf.

There was nothing left for her but to die with him. She died. . . .

She had days and nights of inward agony, unknown to anyone. She had closed her door. No friend could intervene. She had to fight her battles alone. Dreadful battles. Later, when she had come through them, she had broken that most vital passion that kept her still

"enchanted." It was not only her son, whom the unknown forces had given and then taken from her. It was herself, the mother, the woman, whom she had left upon the other shore. Her life stretched out behind her like a shadow at sunset. Her life still followed her. But it was a shadow, about to melt into the great Shadow that spread over all the plain. What was left to her? What was she still? Under the immense eyelid of that Shadow, she was the interior glance of the Being that drew her on.

One morning, she awoke as from the tomb. A spirit without a body. Her life seemed detached from her. The shadow now scarcely held to her heels. . . .

That morning, the old Italian friend, just returned from a long journey, came to see her. He had not seen her since Marc's death. When he came in, she was sitting in her room. She had not consented to stay in bed for a single day. She did not want to have to bear the nursing of those around her, or their pity. They hardly remarked the state of her health. She was apparently plump, and there was color in her cheeks. But that bloom was deceptive. The poison of quasi-chronic influenza fevers was in her veins; and it was beginning to affect her heart.

Bruno was struck by the change in her. He perceived the revolution which had taken place. Annette greeted him with affectionate eyes. But the tired eyes were absent in the friend's presence. Everything Bruno had meant to say seemed to him futile and out of place. He said nothing of what was in their minds. Nothing about death; and nothing about the dead. There was a long silence between them. Bruno found himself carried thirty years back, into those silences under the sun of

the Maremma where his sorrow had matured in fever. Once more he lived through *"the Great Darkness,"* under the blinding torpid light—*"nothing in the heart, not a movement. . . ."* The bare soul, *"which has become non-love,"* feels its first contact with the One. . . . It is the first night's hostelry on the bitter road that leads to deliverance and peace. We cannot spare those we love that pilgrimage. They need only be capable of enduring to the end. Annette would be. Bruno's eyes scanned the swollen face of his distrait friend, the dark redness of that blood congealed under the cheeks, sleeping as fever sleeps under the reeds of the flowery marshes in the sun. . . . "Awake! Reopen, fount of tears! Blood, begin to flow once more! . . ."

In the silence, Bruno, dreaming aloud, told in an undertone, a mysterious story—the parable of Narada:

"One day, Narada said to Krishna:—'Lord, lift the veil of Maya for me!' Some time passed. Krishna led Narada into a desert, they walked together for a few days. Krishna said:

" 'Narada, I am thirsty, go thou and fetch me water!'

"Narada set out to find water. He came to a village. He knocked at a door. A very beautiful girl opened it. As soon as he saw her, he forgot everything, he looked at her. Overwhelmed with love, he asked for her hand. They were married, she bore him two children, they lived together for twelve years. He was happy, with his wife, his children, his flocks and his fields. One night the river rose. All the village was submerged. The houses fell in ruins, men and beasts were swept away. Narada swam, battling against the current, and he carried his wife and children. One of the children slipped from his grasp. In trying to save him, he dropped the other, his wife was torn from him by the violence of the current. He was

cast up alone, upon the shore, and he sobbed bitterly. . . .

"Then a gentle voice behind him asked:

"'My child, where is the water? Thou didst go to fetch me a glass of water and I am waiting for it. Thou hast been gone half an hour.'

"'Half an hour!' exclaimed Narada. . . .

"Twelve years had passed. Twelve years of joy and sorrow . . . had passed under the eyes of Maya."

Annette listened, with emotion, and at the last words, she shuddered. She said:

"And I have not even brought back the glass of water! . . ."

Bruno answered:

"You have reached the fountain. You have but to draw from it."

Annette hid her face in her hands and wept. When she looked up, she saw tears also in Bruno's eyes; but his expression was calm. She took his hand:

"My dear friend, you know the fountain too! You reached it before I did."

"There is a crowd of us."

"What a silence!"

"Listen well!"

"I hear nothing."

"Listen."

At that moment the pipe of a Pyrenean goatherd passed down a street, in the distance. And Bruno said:

"The flute of Krishna."

They were silent. Annette's eyes lit up. She said to herself:

"Have I been dreaming? Is everything but Dream?"

LXIII

But the following night, the woman lying with her limbs bound and enveloped by torpor, as by a shroud, sat up, threw back the sheets, and said:

"No, I will not have the goatherd! . . . And why should the glass of water be more real than my poor lost Marc? Either my sorrow is illusion, and the One also, and all is nothing. Or all is true, all is real, evil and good, death and the One. And can I decide either way? My desire and my fear alone make one side of the scale sink. I know nothing. Let me have the courage to know nothing, and to face the 'Whichever thou art—Nothing, or All' and still go on to the end of my destiny! For that alone, that at least is mine: my will. Not to give in. To look without flinching. To die marching. . . ."

LXIV

One such spasm of truth and courage is not sufficient to take the heroic "*Que sais-je?*" by assault, and plant one's flag upon it. When you have all but reached it, the ground crumbles under your feet, and you find yourself at the foot of the hill again, walking in the ashes, as in those of Vesuvius; and there beside you all those touts, watching for your exhaustion, to offer, to force a support upon you. . . . The flute of Krishna . . . It sounded many times in Annette's ear, when she was worn out. And more than once her weariness welcomed it, and its inextinguishable hope. . . . And why should it be rejected? Before the tribunal of "*Que sais-je?*" faith and hope retain their rights, as the other side of the possible—all the possibles—but the possibles have no right to take precedence of the real. They cannot make what is, not be. . . .

"I am. I am a woman who has borne a son—who hoped to survive in him. My son is dead. I survive him. And my only resource, and his resource, is that he should survive in me. I promised him. Him who falls, the other will carry to the end. I have no right to lie down in my memories, in my sorrow, in my hope. Up! It is not I who marches on, it is he. I give him my body. But in my body, he will march further, dead, than he did living."

Henceforth Annette lived the life of her son. She had transposed the tune of the goatherd's flute. The glass of water was for Marc, who had given the order to go and draw it. To act for him! It was the most certain reality. And all the rest was the Dream, in which

the soul lies down to rest between the tasks of two days. As her legs grew heavy, and she had to sit down by the side of the road to recover her breath, she wrapped herself in the Dream, as in a shawl thrown over her sweat-dampened shoulders. But she got up again, and she marched on, never straying from the road.

LXV

She had still many deserts to cross. The most arid lay before her, as her footsteps left behind the red sands beneath which welled the bloody spring. An instinct of self-defense in the organism makes it react, in the exaltation of sorrow, as if influenced by alcohol. But when the intoxication is over it leaves the organism weaker, and more prostrate. There were months of gray, dreary, breathless despair. Not uninterrupted months, nor weeks, nor days. One could not live. The torturing beneficence of nature wills that the soul should recover breath, to lose it again, according to a disordered rhythm, which slowly returns to equilibrium. Periodically the wave decreases and swells. Annette sank and then reappeared on the surface. But this great tide went on far from shore. It admitted no onlookers, and all eyes shunned it. The desolation of these ocean spaces is like joy that goes beyond bounds; it will tolerate no sharing. One is alone in it, and wills to be alone.

Annette was. Assia was. Each apart. Each one shut herself up with her dead. He was two, for the two women who had loved and possessed him—she whose womb had brought him forth—she whose womb had brought forth by him: the two who had lodged him.

Annette stayed at home, surrounded by material reminders of her boy, his clothes, his papers which she was sorting; she lived over a whole life of his of which she was only partly aware: for however intimate he had been with the two women he had kept the greater part of the activities of his mind to himself. A man's pride. A woman's is not less. Each his own. One is not bound

to share anything of the tree but the fruit. The secret channels by which the sap works its way are one's own.

She read his letters and his rough notes, the scattered pages of a diary in which he entered days and hours irregularly—when he had time. She espoused his emotions, his debts of heart and mind. And to approach him closer, she undertook to visit those who had been on friendly terms with him. Several were dead, or had disappeared.

But, late one afternoon, I saw a woman enter my little house near Lake Leman: an old woman with sweet short-sighted eyes, whose sunken cheeks had that hollow of the Virgin-mothers of Vinci and that touching smile, at the corners of the lips, in which tenderness and sadness are blended with the "What is the use? . . ." I recognized her at once, and I saw her again crossing the little stream on stepping stones, leaning on her son. She greeted me with that proud ease of a Roman matron that was natural to her. But I read under it (as soon as we began to speak) a shyness, all the more touching, seeking words to excuse herself. She said:

"I had no right to come and trouble you. Forgive me. I could not resist it. I am the mother of one of those you have helped."

I replied:

"A few minutes ago, I did not know that you would come. But now that you are here, it seems to me that I was expecting you."

The short-sighted eyes grew wide, in the calm face in which the spirit kept emotion from appearing, and she said:

"You do not know who I am."

"I do know," I said. "You are Marc Rivière."

Her cheeks had grown sallow from long days shut up

alone with her sorrow; the blood had ebbed inward from them; but now they were suddenly tinged with two brown stains, and I saw the violence of that passionate blood.

"How, how could you tell?" she said. "I am not like him. . . ."

"He lives within you. It is true, perhaps, that the house is not like him. But he is there. He is looking at me out of the window."

And it was true. I could see him through the windows of her eyes. An unconscious mimicry makes the countenance unknowingly model itself upon the image of the beloved that haunts it.

She answered:

"Ah! how happy it makes me to hear you say that! So he is indeed here?" (She pressed her hands to her bosom.) "I have really succeeded in keeping him! . . ."

We remained silent. She was too overcome. I had turned my eyes away, so as not to trouble her. After hesitating, her hand touched mine. She said:

"Thank you."

I said:

"This is not the first time I have seen you."

She asked:

"Why, where?"

I told her. She said:

"So your eyes have witnessed my happiness. Keep it for me! When I am too overwhelmed, I shall know that it is in your charge; and perhaps you will let me come again, to make sure that it is still alive."

Then she said:

"I too had seen you before. No, not that day. Not your features. But your kindness to my boy—and your reflection in his mind!"

"I did very little."

"That little was the hand that showed him the way, when he was lost and wandering."

"I ask you, in my turn, how you know it?"

"He wrote it. Would you like to read it? I have copied it out for you. And I have also brought you back your letters. Forgive me! I have read them."

"They are yours. As to the way which you say I showed him, do you bear me no grudge for the precipices to which it led him?"

"You could not foresee them."

"I did not foresee the one by the Arno. But in any case his way was bordered by them."

"And, knowing that, you said to him: 'Go!'?"

"I did. I could not do otherwise."

She bent her head, then raised it.

"I would have said it too. It was his way. When I made him, when I gave him birth, when I saw him growing up, I knew that his way would be dangerous. It cannot be otherwise nowadays—except for cowards. Many a night I have wept beforehand for his death. But I hoped, at least, that it would wait for mine. What rends my heart is that it did not even wait till he had lived. Death took him at the first steps of his manhood, when light was beginning to dawn in him, before he had time to shed it abroad."

"He shed his blood. And that pure blood is a light."

"She who loved him, his young wife, rubbed her eyes with it. And I, the mother, put my mouth to it."

And I saw the two women, lying on the dead, and the blood of the dead round the mouth and the golden eyes. . . .

"Let me," I said, "put mine to your hands. They have touched him."

I kissed the palms of her hands. She got up. I asked:

"You are going? So soon?"

"I can bear no more to-day. We have communicated in him."

On the threshold, reddened by the sunset, I asked:

"I shall see you again?"

"You shall see me."

She went away.

She wrote to me, two or three times—once a year, about the date of the anniversary—short letters that stopped at the first lines. She never came again. And I rarely saw her. We had no need of words; as she had said, we communicated in her son.

LXVI

She sank herself into Marc's life and death. She learnt to understand his mission better than he had known it himself. He had fallen before the battle as a parleyer for the army. His white flag of non-violence, dyed with his blood, was red now, like the standard of millions of the sacrificed. Annette did not hesitate. She picked it up. One could no longer stand aside from the battle. Art and faith, pure thought and nature, are as the shadow of a great wood, and the fountain where the weary soul comes to rest and quench its thirst. But no one has the right to remain apart there. Life is where the suffering of men and their combat are, in the sun and the rainstorm.

LXVII

Assia, also, had borne the heavy burden of her sorrow alone. One cannot share it. Mourning does not draw people together, it isolates them. There is no one to whom we can speak of *my* dead . . . "*My* dead . . . Mine . . . like *my* sorrow! It is all I have left." We crouch over it like the dragon over its treasure, and keep it between our claws, against our body, and tear the flesh with our memories. We will not lend any of it to others. . . .

Yet, in the first days, she had not been able to stay alone in the flat where she had lived with Marc. It was terrible. Every moment she found him who was no more. It was as if at every moment she stumbled on the edge of the void. It was impossible to breathe. She must fall in, or go away. She went and took a room in an hotel. She refused peremptorily, without explanation, Annette's offer of a room in her home. And Annette did not insist; she understood. She did not even repeat the question she had asked, that she might, at least, know Assia's address. They both needed time to get over the worst of their sorrow. . . . In those first weeks, Assia dwelt, like Annette, in a living grave.

But she was still too young to be able to remain there for long. She reappeared at Annette's one night, haggard, emaciated, shivering, looking distracted, coming to find refuge from her thoughts. Annette made up a cot for her, beside her own. It was not enough. In the night Assia's fingers came clutching at Annette's. They did not speak. They held each other, like those who walk

in the mountains, on the edge of the precipice, roped together.

In the morning Assia returned to her hotel. But she reappeared, more than once, after dark. Then she made up her mind to go back to the flat of the dead. But she came back to Annette for the evening meal; and when her mind was too shaken, she spent the night on the divan. At last she completely settled in her own flat again. It had been arranged that the child should stay, provisionally, with his grandmother, where Assia saw him every day. The provisional became definitive, without anything having been said about it. Good reasons were not lacking: the good which the child's presence did Annette; and the evident fact that the child was better with his grandmother than with his mother. Assia openly accused herself of ineptitude at education; and Annette, after having tried discreetly for Assia's good to attach her more closely to the child, did not insist: her own selfishness wished to keep him.

But how did Assia spend her days? She was too active to remain indefinitely chewing the end of her memories. After having begun to sort them—all those relics, all those papers in her flat—she had lost the inclination to continue, she had left everything half done—order and disorder—in that worst disorder in which it is no longer possible to find anything! . . . She struggled in vain: the present of yesterday receded, every day, into the past; and she, she continued to advance. She could take with her from the past only that which was able to advance with her.

At first, there was that rancor at the crime, that thirst for vengeance against those who had torn her Marc from her. But where and how to get at them? The "well-informed" were perhaps not quite so much so as they ap-

peared; and if they had been, they were not anxious to let it be known that they were in "the secret of the gods." Jean Casimir, on whom it was not easy to lay one's hands, now declared that he had not foreseen the catastrophe; he tried rather to minimize the meaning of the warnings he had given them on the eve of their departure; he said that they were merely counsels of "general prudence," inspired by his "general experience." But when Assia, her nostrils puckered, forced him back on his entrenchments, asking him what that "general experience" might be, he eluded her questions, and avoiding anything definite, spoke only of the risks attached to those who are a menace to all-powerful interests.

"You know them as well as I do. . . ."

And he immediately added:

"But in Marc's case, that had nothing to do with the disastrous chance of which he was the victim."

There are times when chance is epidemic. It had struck Timon down too. . . . And others assassinated by error, or by accident. . . . It was useless to expect that Zara would have investigated the accident. He had sent his condolences, as though it had been a matter of a railway wreck. . . . Many years later when Assia met Zara in America and questioned him, he avoided the subject, hinting that the blow had come from someone further off, and higher than *"the master."*

"Where from? And who, in your country, is more master than *'the master'*?"

Zara shrugged his shoulders:

"He is not even master of his police! . . ."

Nothing could be known at the moment. Those who knew and had not done it, those who had done it, perhaps, without knowing, would say nothing. . . . Assia clenched her teeth with rage. . . . But what need had she to

know more? She knew. She knew the *"Is fecit cui prodest."* She knew if not *who*, she knew *where* the enemy was. And she knew where the arms were to strike at him. She was in haste to rejoin her camp—that of the Revolution. That of the great proletarian Union. And she persuaded herself that in doing so she would be carrying out Marc's will, she would be his executor: she would do what he had not been able to do. Thus, as in the ancient beliefs, the soul of the dead would be not only avenged, but fed, by that action which is life and from which he had been cut off. Assia would pour him the libation, blood, her blood burning to be shed—and over and above, if possible (and it would be possible!), the blood of the enemy.

But vengeance and craving for action did not fill Assia's troubled soul, the soul which had lost its axis, and must make itself another to enable it to act. Her days, her nights sought for the companion by her side. In vain did she sense Marc, his shade, his breath, his warm limbs in the dark: it was not he, her feverish clasp embraced the void. She was left unsatisfied. And while the pitiless flood of life was rising day by day, beating against the sluice, Assia, fierce and rebellious, clenched her fists against her breast, gnawed by the craving, the craving for Marc, for the companion. And from day to day, the clenched fists and the revolt relaxed. The companion would come. One must live. . . . She said to herself:

"To live for Marc! . . ."

When she had said it, she started, and before her mirror, she spat at her face therein.

But the next night she began again:

"Live or die. . . . My dear boy, what good would it be to you for me to die useless? You want me to live for you. Help me! If you cannot help me, I must help

myself. I cannot do it alone. Find me a companion!"

He found her one. If it had not been that one, it would have been another. If an Assia does not find one, she creates one, she makes herself another axis.

She did not succeed in this without a long and violent struggle. Assia was never duped, even by necessary illusions that she built up. But when an illusion is necessary to recover one's footing in active reality, it is because the illusion is itself a part of reality and has a right to realization. . . . Right, strength . . . She must conquer her right.

She conquered it hardly, stormily. . . . Assia disappeared for weeks. She was seen no more in Annette's home. Then Sylvie, with spiteful looks, brought the tale that the daughter-in-law had been seen at parties, surrounded by admirers, and that there was talk of her flirtation with an American. Annette received the news without showing her feelings; and her affection for Assia was undiminished.

But when she saw Assia again, after an eclipse of several weeks, she felt troubled and tried to conceal it. She hid it clumsily. Assia was not more skillful. Both women felt that there was something serious to be revealed. But neither of them could make up her mind to speak. Assia now came to Annette's nearly every day. But she did not stay. As soon as she came in, she glanced at the window and the door, as if she was anxious to escape. Sometimes she was very affectionate and never ceased kissing Annette. Sometimes she was irritable, and answered impatiently. Or she came in and would not sit down; she would tap the furniture with nervous fingers, approach Annette, whose eyes were lowered over her work, seem on the point of saying something, then say nothing or say something trivial. Or she would go in the other room and sit still for a

quarter of an hour, then leave abruptly, hardly opening her mouth to say good-by.

One day when she was there, even more silent than usual, standing beside Annette's chair, and seeming to look at the work over which Annette was bending (Annette's eyes, glancing sideways, level with Assia's hands, saw them trembling), Annette raised her head from her work and met Assia's eyes, looking her squarely in the face. Assia turned her eyes away, and her chin began to tremble. She said irritably:

"What are you looking at me for?"

"Is it forbidden?"

Assia continued stubbornly:

"Why do you all look as if you were reproaching me?"

"I, my darling?"

"You want to bind me! Am I not free to do as I like with my life?"

Annette dropped her work, took Assia by the wrists, and drew her closer. Clasping her round the hips, she rested her cheek against Assia's side, and looked up at the angry mouth, which was twisted as if by pain and the desire to inflict pain. And she murmured tenderly:

"My poor child! . . ."

Assia sank to her knees, hiding her face on Annette's knee. Annette stroked her hair:

"Of course you are free to do what you like with your life! Don't you know that I would be there to defend your liberty, if anyone should dispute it?"

Assia suddenly raised her head. Her cheeks were flaming. She seized Annette's hands:

"You would defend me, you?"

"Haven't I always done so?"

Assia kissed the hands impetuously, and hid her face again in Annette's lap. Annette waited a moment:

"Come, tell me! . . ."

"I dare not. . . ."

"Dare, my child. . . . What you dare to do, you must dare to say. And I know."

She timidly showed her eyes again.

"What do you know?"

Annette took Assia's cheeks between her hands:

"Can this face hide anything from me?"

"Ah! How you must despise me!"

"Why, no, my child: I pity you, and I envy you for being caught by life again. I have been caught often enough to know what it is like. Thank God it is over for me now. But it is not over for you, thank God! Dear young thing, I see in your eyes (don't turn them away!) many joys, and many sorrows still. Take them, my daughter! You have a right to them."

She kissed Assia's eyelids.

Assia wept.

"Ah! it's horrible! . . . I did not want to! . . ."

Annette raised her from the ground and tenderly drew her onto her lap; she took a handkerchief and wiped Assia's eyes and nose as if she were taking care of a child. Assia put her arms round Annette's neck and, with her mouth pressed to the hollow of Annette's shoulders, averted her wet eyes. Annette pressed her lips to her daughter's ear and whispered:

"Now tell me. Whom do you love?"

In a low choking voice, which gradually grew animated, Assia told her.

LXVIII

Annette paid special attention to what Assia said about the man to whom she was engaged.

He was a young American engineer who had worked some years for the U.S.S.R.; he had come for the work, and had ended by being caught by the workers. Howard Drake had come to Russia imbued with his pride as an American technologist, to whom the masses are, like the world of matter, an instrument for the expert hands of master technicians. He had the honesty to admit that if he had taught the masses out there to put man at the service of the machine, they had taught him, in return, to put the machine at the service of man. It was an ancient truth, which American individualism thought its own, and which, without realizing, it had forgotten. It was not too late to learn it again, in the school of his pupils of the old world rejuvenated. Drake even took a paradoxical pleasure in representing these materialists of Russia, these slayers of God against whom the idealism of Europe and America was leading a crusade, as the true unconscious idealists facing the masked and perfumed materialism of the false devotees and right-thinkers of the West.

Annette, who asked to be introduced to him, saw a tall young man, with red hair and candid laughing eyes, in whom, as in many others of his race, a hard and cunning spirit of enterprise was blended with a solidity of feeling that was restfully fresh. He was sincerely in love with Assia; he saw nothing of the differences of their two natures and two races; by reaction against the prejudices of his own race, he was convinced that all races were alike, and in asserting this he displayed the same hide-bound

obstinacy as those of his countrymen who thought themselves the elect race, and denied equality to others. Yet, he was not unaware of the risks attending a companion who brought him a young already laden past. (One might be sure that Assia had hidden nothing from him! She was honest to a vice.) But Drake accepted the risks.

He had the absurd and vigorous confidence of a man in love, and of an American who believes in his own strength: after all, it is the best way of making others believe it! And (what was better) he possessed that American respect for woman and for the privileges which Anglo-Saxon males voluntarily accord her, in order to enhance her value in their own eyes.

Annette told Assia affectionately that she was luckier than she deserved, and after discussing the matter with her, approved her choice. In all circumstances she was truly Assia's mother. She considered nothing but her daughter's interests.

There was no mention of her dead son. It was Assia who spoke of him; to be silent on one's deepest and most poignant feelings was to her an unknown virtue. She said:

"My God, my God! . . . My poor Marc! How he would suffer, if he knew! . . ."

Annette's mouth showed a slight irritation, but she immediately effaced it. . . . That unfortunate Assia! She was clever at torturing herself and others with thoughts, without doing anything to avoid actions the thought of which tortured her. . . . Annette said:

"Marc loved you too much not to love your happiness."

Assia insisted:

"I am unfaithful. . . ."

"Such words are not current where he is; there is no further question of claiming proprietary rights."

"But where I am, I am a traitor to myself."

"Treason is life. Calm yourself!"

"I can't calm myself. I loved him. I gave myself. I bound myself."

"I unbind you. . . . You will not be free for long."

"I can't be! And if I am not I suffer. How do you manage?"

"I wear out my bonds."

"Ah! I should wear out my skin first. They are encrusted in my flesh. They hurt me, and I must have them. I shall tear them out only with my life."

"Live with them! Love your pain! You are made for it. Would you care for a life without bonds, and without rebellion against your bonds? Oh, dear torment!"

"Oh, dear torment! . . . Yes, I am that. I am that to myself and to all those I love. . . . And I love you. . . . But I cannot understand how you, you can love me!"

"It can't be helped!" said Annette, with a tender laugh. "I am like you. I love my dear torment." (She drew Assia to her breast.) "It makes me young—I want to keep it for a long time! . . ."

The two women kissed each other. The gray-haired one was not the less youthful.

LXIX

When the marriage was announced, Sylvie choked with indignation. George was overwhelmed. Without reasoning about her feelings, she could not bear to meet Assia; she avoided her clumsily; when she heard the young woman's voice in the hall, coming in, she left hastily by a side door; she could not have concealed her icy coldness. Sylvie's air was not icy; and she made no attempt at concealing it. She was hard and contemptuous. It seemed as if Assia had done her a personal injury; and indeed she was not far from believing that Marc had left his interests in her keeping, and that an offense against him was against her. Annette had her work cut out to intervene between these guardians of the dead (who had never asked them to guard him) and touchy Assia, who bristled like a wild cat at the sight of these hostile faces and their openly displayed blame.

When Sylvie heard that Annette acquiesced, her anger was turned against her sister.

Annette said:

"Come, come, let live!"

"So, it doesn't upset you? . . ."

"What it does to me concerns me alone. What it does to you concerns you alone. It is her affair. She has the right."

"The right to abandon our boy, and less than a year since she shared his bed!"

"The child has her life before her. As to us, ours is behind us, with those who have fallen. We are sufficient to watch over them. Let the young people go on their

way! Sylvie, it's good to walk straight ahead, without looking back, when one is not even thirty!"

"I cannot endure that she should forget!"

"And you, did you refrain from it!"

"What? Did I forget? Never! Nothing that I love. Nothing that I hate."

"Don't boast! You don't take me in. Neither you nor I could have lived without forgetting. Fierce and pitiful forgetfulness, which makes one die and rise again. Sylvie, Sylvie, how many times have we died and risen again, leaving our dead behind us! . . ."

"Our dead? Who?"

"Ourselves. Where are they, the Annettes and Sylvies of bygone days?"

"I see them still, the Annettes, all the Annettes," said Sylvie, taking her sister's hands, her eyes softened by a gleam of tenderness. "I find again all the Tom Thumb's stones that you strewed along the road."

"Well, find again, too, the hard and burning little pebble that the Sylvie was at that child's age! And let it incite you to indulgence!"

"I am not indulgent to myself. Why should I be so to the other bitch?"

"Now, don't start being bigoted! I would rather have you a bitch than a bigot. Dogs, at least, have kind eyes. Make your eyes kind!"

"Look at them! For you, at you.—But for her, at her, no, no, and no!"

"You are wrong. Forgive and give!"

"I'm wrong. . . . Perhaps. . . . But I choose to be wrong. . . . I will never forgive her. However, let her marry whoever suits her! And let her Puss-in-Boots sweep us clear of her. Bon voyage! I'll scratch away the very trace of her with my nails!"

Annette shrugged her shoulders, and said no more. When Sylvie was in a rage, God Himself would have had to strike His flag.

Annette and Assia arranged to spend the last days alone together. The hostility of the others, or their polite disapproval, which Assia read even in the compliments of Julien and Bruno, the sting of remorse that pierced her, made her appreciate Annette's understanding all the better. Even alone, she needed it in asserting her right to herself. She was sure of her right: it would not have been good to touch it! But she was of those whom no scruple can prevent from conquering, and who, when victory is won, go back to find the scruples they have left behind. Now the world, of which they took no account in going forward, must come and help them to sweep up the dust their footsteps have left. The world does not move! Nobody sweeps before his neighbor's door; one would be more inclined to sweep the dirt out of his own path. Annette had to rack her brains to make Assia's doorstep, her troubled conscience, shine. And as a young soul, after mourning, is eager to snatch at offered happiness, Assia was only too anxious to be convinced; she was radiant. It left a poignant melancholy with Annette, despite her efforts, when she found herself alone again. One cannot please everybody, all those we love, all those who dwell in our hands, the living and the dead; each one sighs:—"*My* joy, *my* sorrow . . ." and what makes the joy of one, makes the sorrow of the other. It is for the elders to give up their share. Shut up alone with her big son, her elder (the dead are always the elders of the living), Annette heard him say:

"Give my share! What use is it to me? Let her have the benefit of it! Let her be happy, our child! Let her love again! Let us be happy to see her come to life again!"

Assia had never been more filial and tender than during these last days. She yielded to her mother even the most remote secrets of her past life, of her present soul—some that she had never confided to anyone, not even to Marc on their pillow (and goodness knows, she had fed him with plenty that he could very well have done without!). They were not often flattering to herself; but it seemed to her that she could give no better proof of her gratitude than these confessions, which stripped her of all prestige; she placed herself naked and defenseless in Annette's hands. She knew very well that those hands would accept everything, would reject nothing. And it is such a relief! Once, just once in one's life, to be able to show oneself as one is, as one hardly dares see oneself in the mirror—and then to hear herself called: "My daughter. . . ." Even with Annette, it was possible only because they were about to part. . . .

Yes, Annette listened, understood. She understood the value, as of a present, that this unreserved confession had in Assia's mind. Nevertheless, it made the tips of her fingers quiver. All that substratum of the soul, that one does not usually stir up. . . . Yet she had seen and known many of them in her life! But this young woman revealed to her still more unexpected aspects. Those monsters of the heart and mind! . . . Her poor Marc had slept beside them. . . . Had he suspected them? . . . He had others himself! . . .

"And I have mine. . . . All that jungle! . . . After all, one is more at peace, where he is. . . ."

But she clasped her arms about the dear girl with the tender body, who hid within her this fever and these cruel

shadows and, in an impulse of wild confidence, came and made her a gift of them.

Assia gave her a better gift, purer, and costing her more. She made over the care of the child to his grandmother. It must be confessed that he would have been in her way. When you begin a new honeymoon, you cannot, without embarrassment, burden yourself with a quarter of the moon that has waned. It reminds you too much of vanished nights. But, nevertheless, it was a sacrifice. Assia might be reproached with loving badly all those she loved —except her lover. Her love was ill-directed. But she could not be reproached with lack of it for her child. She loved him with transport, with an animal possession. . . . "Mine! I made him. I still hold him by the navel. He belongs to me. . . ." But she had no mind to belong to him. Assia's instinct took no account of justice in the bargain. She forgot him, then took him again. She could not fix her life and passion on him. And as her mind was just, or at least capable of seeing what was just, she realized that she was wronging the child, and would wrong him still more in the future; for seeing that she was wrong would not have made her alter in the least. The greatest effort of will she could bring herself to was to renounce possession, since she acknowledged that she could not fulfill the duties of that possession. But she could not despoil herself of it without anguish. And she wanted Annette to appreciate the sacrifice she was making to her. She would not have made it to anyone else. Not even (she admitted it to herself at that moment) if the child's welfare had demanded it. They were well fitted to understand each other with half a word—the two passionate souls!

On the eve of her departure, the last night, Assia was again seized by a violent fit of despair and cried out

that now she did not want this new marriage, she would not leave her Marc, she wanted to stay with Annette, to keep him. . . . Annette said:

"Go, my child! Go and fight! It is for Marc. Fight for him, for what he wanted, for what he was not able to do! For our cause!"

Assia quivered. She seized Annette's arms:

"For our cause? Do you belong to it then?"

Annette bowed her head:

"I am with our Marc. Marc is in me. The laws of this world are reversed. I gave him birth. And now he gives me birth in his turn. . . ."

Assia hugged her:

"Mother of my Marc! Daughter of my Marc! . . . All that is left of my hearth! . . ."

"And don't forget your little flame—your Vania!"

"Guard it for me between your hands!"

"I watch out for it and for you. . . . Go, my child. Whatever becomes of us both, you will always find in me the guardian of the hearth, to shelter and defend you, if necessary, against the whole world."

"The world is nothing, I can see to that," said Assia. "Defend me against myself. I will be your arm. Be my heart!"

Assia went away with her husband. Annette remained with her Marc. She had to make up to him now for her who had gone.

And he was there, sitting beside her in the room, his eyes alive, his arms and legs paralyzed, his spirit burning: he said to her:

"March for me! Act for me! Fight for me!"

LXX

The era of battle had reopened. It had not been closed for twenty years. But the great war of 1914 was only the entrance door. And the Revolution had passed through the door.

It was an explosion, not only undermining the basis of society in one country or another. It disturbed in their depths all the fashions of thought. All moral and social conceptions were secretly modified by it. Pure reason, attained through knowledge of universal Relativity, had been the first battlefield, according to its right of primogeniture (they say it is the last born, I think the contrary; but even if it were so, it has stolen the right of primogeniture, like Jacob); pure reason had been the first theater of the necessary Revolution. Unseen, Revolution played its true part of "*sovereign exciter of human movement.*" As Schopenhauer said, "*Yes, if life is not absurdity and decadence, Revolution is all, envelops all, and becomes great metaphysics.*" [1]

Only, added the stern Buddhist of Frankfort, "*Beware of mealy-mouthed metaphysics! Do not forget that the great problem is not that of good, but that of evil. A philosophy throughout the pages of which there is not heard the sound of the tears, the groans, the gnashing of teeth, the formidable pandemonium of universal murder, is no philosophy.*"

The murmur of that sea filled the world. One had to be deaf, as the selfish bourgeois tried to be, shutting themselves up in the last remainders of their threatened

[1] Conversations of Schopenhauer with Frédéric Morin in 1858. "Revue de Paris 1864."

comfort, not to hear that rising flood of suffering and revolt. Annette's ears missed nothing of it. Thanks to Julien Davy, who received daily from all the martyrized countries, principally from the East of Europe, a mass of letters, documents, and calls for help, she was kept in communion with that Passion of humanity. She was not overwhelmed by it, as was Julien, who was oppressed by the monotony of that *lamento* and the feeling of being powerless to succor the victims. She had paid her due, her greatest love, her son sacrificed to the sorrow of mankind; she had given what she held most dear, she was not a spectator in the tragedy, depressed by the unavowed shame of being spared; she had the right to be ranked among the masses of the oppressed, and having nothing further to lose, she saw all the more boldly the road by which the peoples must pass.

The road was blocked for the present. The Revolution, in Europe, had allowed Reaction to take the offensive. Deprived of the effective support of the U.S.S.R., which was wholly taken up by the needs of its enormous construction—that Russia like a huge animal shedding its skin, which must, while the new skin is still tender, keep itself apart from combats—revolutionary Europe had not known how to organize itself. An unbelievable timidity paralyzed the Socialist parties, which parliamentarism had divested of faith and energy in two generations. They remained fettered by an absurd regard for law, to which their adversaries, the great Fascist bourgeois who were more sophisticated, paid no heed in crushing them. By the most derisory of paradoxes, those who ought, by all means and at any price, to have cleared the way for the new order, made themselves the timid supporters of the old order and its moth-eaten principles, in which the cynical and clear-eyed leaders of Reaction no longer believed

(they made use of them when the principles served their turn, and violated them when the principles hampered them). These law-abiding Socialists, whose fratricidal rancor against the Communists threw them back, day by day, upon the past, were afraid of the combat, not only from fear of the combat, but from fear of the result. They were afraid of defeat. They would have been afraid of victory. They had lost confidence in themselves. The blood of action receded from them. . . . And those in whom that blood flowed, the Communists, not knowing where to use it, wasted it in vain quarrels and threats, in raised fists, noisy parades and rodomontades, which took the place of the silent and tenacious discipline preparatory to real organized action, and which roused the enemy and incited them to arm themselves.

The enemy had made the first move. The leaders had known how to exploit the unnecessary panic to which the chatterers of the Revolution by their imprudent threats had moved the troubled flocks. Throughout Europe Fascism posed as the defender of moral and social order, of the woolen stocking, of the coffers of the family, of the country, of the "sick mother" and the Father God. The great bourgeois, having, with good reason, but little confidence in their own energy, had been sagacious enough to hand the bludgeon to *Duci* and *Führer*, risen from the people, whose energy was intact, and who transformed themselves from wolves to watchdogs. To the dictatorship of the proletariat they opposed the dictatorship of proletarians, traitors to their class and temporarily invested with unlimited power to rivet it to the galley-slave's bench. The black or brown plague of Fascism spread from one country to another; its virulence increased with success. Even France and England, the last deposit banks in whose coffers democratic liberties were kept, forgot how to make use of them and withdrew them from circulation.

It was no longer the time to tergiversate. Academic discussions, pro or con, for violence or non-violence, were out of season. It was a question of uniting all the forces of both violence and non-violence, against the union of all the forces of Reaction. All should find a place in the Army: the great organized Refusal of Gandhi, and the attacking troops of Lenin. Conscientious objections, strikes in factories and transport, insurrection, everything was a weapon for the battle which Annette's mind now accepted. She recognized that the combat was necessary. And far from withdrawing herself into the dream of the One, which the goatherd's flute had opened to her, she drew energy from it, by her roots, from the depths of the earth; and transfused it into action. What would the One be, if the blood of action did not circulate therein? The One is in action. The One is in motion. If it should stop for a single moment, everything would fall to ruins.

Everything would fall to ruins for an Annette and her brothers and sisters of the West. For thought assumes the countenance of the living will, into which it flows like molten metal into a mold. The same thought which in the veins of Gautama is the smile of Nirvana, in those of a daughter of Europe is the battle smile of the Æginetan Athene. When Count Bruno Chiarenza repeated the saying of the sages of the Thibetan snows: "*To do* is nothing, *to undo* is everything . . . (to undo the sheath, to undo the ego which interposes itself between the spirit and the sun) . . . Annette took it (and it is not sure that Bruno did not take it also) as a call to Revolution. To undo the serried net of illusions and prejudices, the stifling net of the old world. To break the fetters of Michelangelo's Prisoner. To sweep away, by the pressure of new life,

the dams of dead life, of the past. When she recognized herself in that river of interlacing ripples, in which St. Bruno of the Himalayas showed her the image of the myriad individualities of one's self—when she saw her own ripple pass among the rest, and the whole whirling ring journey towards the Ocean, like the cortege of the Indian Bacchus—there was no danger that the holy delirium of Asia, which wakens deep echoes in the soul of Europe (for they are daughters of the same mother), would make her lose her devouring activity. She but lost herself in that moving mass to find herself multiplied therein. In that farandola of the Ganges-spirit, which journeys in huge ripples to the Ocean, it was not the Ocean that attracted her, it was the stream. She espoused it. She heard the footsteps of the Great Army beating in her arteries.

LXXI

Public meetings soon became familiar with the figure of the woman in mourning with her calm, rather heavy, face and bovine eyes, who, in repose, seemed drowsy, absent-minded, distant and apart—but who when she rose to speak, was instantly illuminated by a flood of youth, and who, without haste, without raising her voice, in a low tone, never hesitating, planted her firm words in the mind of the crowd, leading ever to definite action.

Julien Davy had been greatly surprised when Annette asked him to take her with him to one of the anti-Fascist meetings over which he presided. Annette herself was no less surprised when one evening she was moved to ask leave to speak.

Until then, she had never been attracted by public discussions. When she was present, at the back of the hall, she used to see the speakers on the platform. Now, she sat on the platform facing the crowd, she felt the breath of the masses in her face; and their passionate expectation entered into her. This expectation was rarely satisfied by those on the platform, who were busy with the words of their discourse. They spent themselves too much on the strife of parties, whose quarrels did not interest their hearers; and they did not feel the silent pressing appeal made to them:

"Show us the way, the straight road to take! . . ."

Annette heard it, as if she herself had made the appeal, and since no one answered it, she rose. She was obliged to, she had to repeat it aloud, and answer it, as did the coryphæus in ancient drama.

At the first words, the sound of her voice astonished

her; the voice came back to her like that of another greater than herself, another self increased by the waves of the assembly. But, almost at once, she realized that fusion of the speaker with the crowd which makes the strength of the born orator. Yet there was nothing in her manner that savored of eloquence. She produced her effect by her absolute simplicity and by her calmness which threw the boldness of reason into relief. This calmness inspired the hearers with an exultant confidence in themselves and the cause they were defending. She soon became popular. She felt in these meetings that her son was beside her. And he was, in the eyes of many of her hearers: for the story of Marc was soon known; and it became legendary. People saw the son and the mother together.

She contributed by her clearness, and her simplifying and practical woman's wit, to bringing about a necessary rearrangement of parties. Indifferent to labels and bureaucratic formality, she forced the members of the two Internationals, enemies despite a common aim, to enter upon the field of action. Theory could be discussed later! The real line of demarcation between the parties is between those who will and those who will not act. All ideological pretexts for not acting are masks. The woman's hand tore them off with no consideration for the irritation of party politicians whose equivocal game she was upsetting. But the crowd is a woman: it approved. It needs clear situations. Annette took care that the debates should not lose themselves in oratorical confusion; she excelled in summing them up at the end in a clear and practical motion. She spent herself a good deal in active participation in the different organizations for international help and action, in Red and Labor Aid, in Leagues against Imperialism, Fascism, and Colonial Oppression. Once her arm was caught in the machinery,

all the rest followed. She spent more than she had in her bag. The famous calmness which people admired cost her an overtension of the will against the inner pressure. Under the phlegmatic appearance of a tall, robust woman, rather corpulent, whom age has made a little heavy without decreasing her energy, the overtaxed heart began to betray her.

The doctors, according to their habit, made a mystery of her real complaint. They always stake upon an anxious love of life. They cannot imagine that to all men the loss of life is not the supreme misfortune and the unavowed terror. As if the ripened fruit at the end of autumn had no pleasure in falling! . . . Annette smiled at their involved explanations. She knew enough about doctors, through experience as a nurse and intimacy with men of the medical profession, like Philippe Villard, her former lover.[1]

She had met him again recently. He was now an old man with a furrowed brow, eyes still blazing with unsatiated fire, and a heavy disillusioned mouth; he was burdened with honors and never had enough, like that other, Berthelot the Great (he of another age), of whom it was said that his sepulcher in the Pantheon was the only place he was not eager to take possession of (if he was not eager for it, it was because he was sure of having it: the thing one is sure of is of no further interest). Philippe, gorged but unsatiated, sought unceasingly, like the wolf, "*quem devoret*"; and the triviality of the spoil—the world gnawed to the marrow—enraged him. Annette and he had never attempted to meet—without ever having lost sight of each other. But after Marc's death, which had made some stir in the Paris press, Philippe met the

[1] See "Summer."

mother in the street. She was in mourning but she walked proud and erect, her head high, like the women of Italy who carry heavy burdens on their heads. And, seized with admiration, he spoke to her.

They had scarcely an idea left in common. In politics, Villard was a partisan of dictatorships; he treated the human masses like herds of enemies who must be crushed and tamed, as man (man worthy of the name: the master) has succeeded in taming the other animals. The movements of masses, according to his hard mind, belonged to the blind forces of nature, like epidemics. Between him and Julien Davy there was a fundamental antipathy, unexpressed, out of consideration for Annette, but implacable.

And yet, Philippe Villard and Annette, when they were alone together, did not ram themselves against the barrier between them. There still existed between them—binding them—the former embrace, those profound roots of the flesh (flesh is spirit). They knew each other in love and in strife; they knew their strength and their weaknesses: those of one belonged a little to the other: both had tasted them. And there was this further secret that drew them together: both knew that they were doomed.

At the first questions Annette put to him about her disease, he had gone straight to the point: he never minced his words. He had himself described her symptoms—the pain that stabbed her in the breast and spread under the left armpit, along the arm down to the nails. He discerned the blueish swelling of the face, below the eyelids, and the pallor of the hand. Familiar language! He read it at first sight. The body was that of the woman he had possessed. But though both she and he remembered, he scrutinized it, at that moment, with the doctor's

cold glance; and she saw it, like him, from without; she felt herself a stranger to that body. She said:

"It is angina pectoris?"

"The classic angina."

"In that, at least," she joked, "you will not say that I am a romantic."

"You have always been a classic, at bottom, without knowing it."

He watched her as she dressed.

"But how far have I got?"

"You are past the beginning."

"I know that."

"You are a good way on the road."

"And how much is there left?"

"That's according. It is a question of watching your step."

"I never walk now."

"Even without moving, you would always find some means of tearing about."

"And do you know any way to prevent it?"

"I do not, and if I did I should probably not tell you; there are some remedies that kill more surely than the disease."

"To die of the disease, or of the doctor! . . . Let it be the disease!"

He approved her. He knew that he was himself condemned by a disease of the kidneys that never spares. But he never mentioned it to anyone, and continued to pursue his career as though he was to live for ever. So he would have let Annette pursue hers, trusting to her experience to manage her boat. But nevertheless he put a stop to her activities at meetings and committees. Here his medical veto was in agreement with his antipathy for Annette's social work; a good opportunity to stop it!

His antidemocratism included a particular aversion for the mania of women who meddle in politics. Annette was not taken in; naturally she persisted. But the disease took it upon itself to recall her to reason. She had too much good sense to continue. She got out of harness. Philippe had no shame in his triumph.

"Don't be too ready to cry victory," she said. "I have more than one string to my bow."

"But, my Amazon, you have only two arms to string it!"

"You are mistaken. I have made others for myself."

LXXII

She had her daughter Assia, over there. And here, beside her, the child, her son's son. She found herself as she had been thirty years before, with a child to look after.

But nothing begins again. It was not the same child. She was not the same woman. When you have journeyed along the road with a son for thirty years and begin again at the beginning, there is no longer the same fever of expectation. You know where the road leads, and as on the map in the game of "Goose," the wells, prisons, and joys you will find set out upon the way: there is always the risk of the throw of the dice; but the country no longer presents the difficulty of the unknown: you have beaten it. Of course, one makes mistakes! For in the interval the landscape has been modified by the passing of a generation. Other bogs have appeared, and old ones have been filled up. There is danger of being led astray more than once by the very faithfulness of memory.

And then, there is the little new being, who though he is made with pieces of the older being, is another—another world—another epoch. It really is disconcerting. He has the same eyes, the same features. He looks at you . . . Even before he speaks, you feel, you know, that a new guest, and a new era, have come into the house. And this little being, who has just arrived, whom you teach to walk, will find himself, from the very first, at his ease on ground which he already knows much better than you, before he has explored it. He is on the level with to-day. They are in agreement. And you, you are left at the door . . .

It depends on yourself to cross the threshold. Dare to enter the future! It is easy enough for those who discard the past! But Annette would not, she could not; she did not mean to sacrifice either of them. It took her more than a day to harmonize the two. At first Annette contented herself with maternally observing little Jean. She had as much to learn from him, as he from her. And they had George as interpreter.

The strangest, the most charming relationship had grown up between the young girl and the child. Fifteen years separated, or united them. The little boy, not eight years old, the grown girl of twenty-three had by secret treaty decreed themselves king and subject to each other. . . . "You belong to me. You are my property . . ." There had been no need to lay down conditions. Without conditions! "I am your property. I belong to you." Treaty signed! . . . "It is not your will. It is my pleasure. And my pleasure is your pleasure . . ."

What common ground could there be between the child and the adult? All grounds. And all the ties which can bind two human beings to each other—except that which binds the two sexes. They were both just at the crest where the waters divide where one can drink from every spring. There was the fraternal spring: the big sister and the Benjamin. There was the maternal spring: when the child, with some grief or joy too heavy for his little arms, cast himself into the strong arms of the woman, she felt a leaping of warm joy in her very entrails, as if the child were dancing there. There was—there was the very spring of love—the only one, the true one—(there is but one for all beings) that which sleeps or watches, whispers, or speaks aloud, to the hearts of male and female (let these beautiful brutalized words be reëstablished in their dignity!)—love that makes them burn eternally with desire that the two halves of the one being may be united . . . Sacred love which in its mysterious isolation knows no barrier, overleaps ages, and, though its roots are deep in flesh, takes no account thereof in its unbounded force, uniting beings beyond the seas and across the expanses of space and years.

Whence came this mutual need of adoption, that satisfied itself without embarrassment and without difficulty? For the child, from the first days from which his memory held the thread of days unbroken. For three years (it seemed to him that it was always), he had seen his big friend's beautiful teeth laughing above his eyes; and in those summer nights, when from the meadows under the window came the grating rattle of the locusts and from the distance the murmur of the torrent's lamentation (it was in Switzerland during the weeks that his father had gone to meet the Florentine knife), he had listened to the calm breathing of the tall extended body (she had taken him into her bed) and he had rested his cheek and nose in the warm hollow of her arm . . . Happiness and peace . . . Nothing had been able to shake that fundamental impression . . . Not even the day of mourning; and many inexplicable troubles in the house . . . But for them, when they were alone together, the two without a third, there was never any trouble or mourning . . . *Gioia. Pace.* It cannot be explained to you if you have never known that state. Its making is the result of chance. Once in a thousand times, nature brings it off—succeeds with two human beings.

It would seem that in the grown-up girl, will must have played a greater part in the adoption than in the child: for the little companion must, on a given day, have

come into her life, which had not known him before. But here was the strangest thing of all! When she thought of it now it seemed to her impossible that her previous life had not known him. Otherwise, how could she have recognized him so perfectly when he came? She remembered: one day Annette had put the naked child into her hands; and (the mother must have gone out of the room for a moment) she had been left alone with him; troubled by the soft feel on her fingers of the little body, like a featherless bird's, she had bent over the bird, and the *bambino* had smiled. A stroke of joy had struck her, flooded her, from her throat to her knees, and her breasts had grown hard. She discovered her maternity. Never before, in all her life which had been that of a big noisy boy, active and athletic, had she for an instant imagined the thrill of it. And now that it was revealed to her by a lightning stroke, she would not even admit the possibility that she could have lived without him. She had lived for him—awaiting him . . . All that previous time, she had diverted herself with movement and games; all that previous time she had kept him hidden, formed him, fed him, lulled him, that child, *her* child . . . All that little body was new to her, and all known to her, even to the little toe-nails (she laughed with tenderness as she looked at them), even to his smell like that of hot bread.

Naturally, she had not dared to say so aloud, before other people. There was that other woman who called herself the mother (jealous George was grateful to her for being less so than herself). There was Annette . . . (Annette smiled as she watched George and the child; one might indeed suspect that she saw through George, but one did not venture to be sure of it.) And all the others, Sylvie, her father, who was so incapable of understanding . . . She could not betray her secret . . . But what she could have sworn to was that he, the child, had understood! It was their secret between the two of them. And she was right. Excepting that the child found it quite natural, and never dreamed of making a secret of it. Annette, without appearing to interfere, had been obliged to guard Assia's susceptibility from being wounded by it. But in the weeks preceding her marriage, Assia had been too taken up by her passions and troubles to be very observant of the child. When she remembered him, in the midst of her turmoil, she came in like a gust of wind, snatched him from whatever he was doing—his games, or talks with his friend—took possession of him, imprisoned him in her arms, plunged her eyes in his, overwhelmed him with her impetuous questions that waited for no answers and with her embraces, without caring whether they pleased him or not. And when she was satisfied, she left him and returned to her chase after sorrows and hopes.

Annette was the only one who followed, with sidelong glances, the child's moral reactions. Even she saw only half. There was a secret process going on in the little man, which the grown-ups did not suspect. Vania (he was rich in names in the two languages: Jean, Ivan, Jeannot, Vanneau, Vania, Vanioucha) had very soon understood that it was useless, and perhaps even dangerous, to oppose any resistance to the passage of the hurricane . . .

"What does she want to shake me like that for? But it seems she has a right to. She's my mother . . ."

It was best to wait for the hurricane to pass, while offering it the least hold. So, he passively surrendered his body. Nothing of his mind. He was a good observer. He had noticed that in the last days before her remarriage his mother had seemed prettier and better

dressed. She smelt nice. His little puppy-dog nose smelt not only the skin, but the thoughts passing beneath it. He perceived, with a curiosity not unmixed with irony, all the internal upheaval; he listened to that voluble, brusque, sing-song speech; it amused him, tired him, and he never missed a single indiscreet word. He had his own life of thought; and he made his own reflections on the re-marriage. But he told no one about them. And people avoided mentioning the subject to him. All the more reason that he should think of it! (Grown-ups do not know that by avoiding a subject too much, they direct a child's attention to it.) To Vania, his mother was a living problem. Curiosity surpassed tenderness. But it was an attraction all the same. What was inside her? He never asked himself that about George. Which of the two had the better share in him?

For the moment, he waited for the invader who did him violence to release him. He had already remarked that all bothers come to an end. Assia went away. He saw her go far away, without great regret. He appreciated her better after she had gone. It seemed to him that something was missing under his sky . . . Not maternal affection! He had as much maternity around him as he wanted. But he secretly established ranks among his mothers. The one in America, who had left him, was perhaps, by her very abandonment, not the one he prized the least. The criticism of her, which he heard, or guessed at, in those around him, acted in a different manner from what the critics would have suspected. Even if he did not understand the motive of his mother's actions, even if he thought himself wronged by her, he was not the less interested in her. He was more so. He was not one of those hurt and sickly children, who timidly conceal their secret injuries and rancors, or their forbidden

desires. He was provided abundantly enough with affections (those one receives, and those one gives), for one that seemed to be leaving him not to cause him any bitterness; he was sure he could get her back if he liked; and even if she should not come back . . . Good Lord! he would do without her. The little chap had an imperturbable confidence in himself and in life; if he could have expressed it, he would have greatly astonished the women from whom he had come forth: Assia, Annette. It was not a deluded optimism. He had seen enough around him, when quite small, to know that life is not made up of beautiful smiles, tender or unctuous, of good mammas, or good Gods, painted, combed, and bearded, as in the shop-fronts of the rue Saint Sulpice. Very early, at the first hour, he had rubbed up against the hide of wolves, beginning with his mother, and ending (not to end!) with those who had killed his father. Wolves let it be! He was of the band. The essential was not that life should be pleasant. It was that it should be alive. The more life there is, the more nourishment. The little man had a good appetite and good teeth. And in people, good or bad (they are food, too!), what he liked best was that they should be interesting. That tempestuous mother who had gone across the Atlantic interested the urchin! He did not understand, but he sniffed in her the sea breeze (or wind of the steppes? . . .). What did he know about it, except that it blew! Much love, much hate, and those tempests (he had caught her angry words on the wing) against society . . . "Society," what was that? *That* which we are in? . . . "We shall see! We shall be able to judge of that for ourselves . . ." Meanwhile, Vania kept in reserve, against "*that* which we are in," those storms that shake the atmosphere.

Assia was the exceptional mother, the mother for high-days and holidays.

And the other, George, was the everyday mother. He told her so frankly and simply: "One for feast days (feast or tempest), one for common use." And George roared with laughter. She accepted this division. Every day for her share! She left the rest to Assia. She quite understood why Vania kept Assia for feast days. She was herself too sensible of Assia's stormy charm not to be generous. She was not like Sylvie, whose resentment was never placated. If Assia was attacked in George's presence, George defended her; and she forbade herself to reproach Assia for anything whatever. Was not the worst reproach against her that she had made George a gift of her son?

"Our boy. Mine! My bread. Thanks be to the baker's wife! . . ."

LXXIII

Their life together was organized. At first George hurried to Annette's every morning; but she had to go home to her father's for the midday meal; she returned to spend the afternoon with the child, and left him reluctantly, to go home to supper. Julien now lived at Passy, and Annette in the Luxembourg. George was always tearing backwards and forwards, and nobody was satisfied. Julien complained that he scarcely saw his daughter nowadays, and that she was always late for meals. (He was one of those French bourgeois who demand punctuality and are made unbearable by a lack of it.) The child would never let George go. Every time it was a case of good-bys, calls back, and fresh good-bys like lovers. Annette, amused and touched, suggested to her old friend that he should let George have the midday meal with her. Julien consented: his daughter's absence worried him less than her lack of punctuality. Then he too was touched. After taking a long time to understand how George could forsake everything, her home, her work, and her interests, for a whim, he saw (Annette lent him her eyes, which he loved) the beauty of this mysterious maternal flame which had been lit in his daughter's virgin heart. And he granted her wishes before they were expressed. He was a man to sacrifice himself quite simply. It was he himself who proposed that Annette should take George *en pension*. To spare his daughter all remorse, he made the pretext that for a long time he had been planning a voyage to America, for his studies, and that he would probably spend a year there. He would be very glad to know that his daughter was

under Annette's roof. Annette was not deceived; but George was only too ready to be so; and with the selfishness of youth, she burst into shouts of joy and furiously embraced her father, Annette, and the child. Annette, alone with Julien, looked at him, smiled and said:

"My dear Julien . . . My turn!"

She kissed him; Julien, moved and embarrassed, said, with a little cough, seeking his words:

"In reality, my George . . . you know it quite well . . . belongs to you."

Annette put her hand on his:

"I understand . . . She belongs to us both . . . My dear friend! . . ."

They changed the subject. At their age there is no need to tell. One knows.

The moving in was soon over. It was a joy to both children. George took Assia's old room; Vania's little bed was in a narrow room beside it, the door of which was left ajar. Through the partition, which was close to her pillow, Annette could hear them in the morning whispering and laughing, like sparrows, their bare feet pattering on the floor, as they paid each other visits from one room to the other. Then it was decided, since nothing obliged them to stay in Paris, that they would move to the suburbs; and they took a simple light house, on the edge of Meudon woods, with a few trees and a garden; they felt less confined there. There was even a room for Sylvie, if she liked. But Sylvie hung back. The best way to make her come was to look as if one was not keen to have her. Not that she did not crave to be loved, though she pretended not to believe in affection. But she craved still more for independence; and she grew more touchy about it with age. She was

always up in arms against anything that she thought might interfere with it.

"Very well, shut yourself up in your belfry! You can come down when you like. We shall be glad if you come. If you don't come we will make the best of it . . ."

The little world of three was complete, like a chord: Anne, the virgin, and the child. And as in the Florentine altar-pieces, St. Annette, of the Leonardesque smile, made up of irony and tenderness, held between her knees the tall girl, who held the child on her knee. But if she brooded over the two, the two saw only themselves. Annette delayed long in sending the boy to school. She recognized the genius for education which this maternity of choice had called forth in the virgin-mother; and to begin with she surrendered the plastic material of the little body to the skillful robust hands of the modeler.

He spent part of the year half naked, in the garden or the woods, dressed only in breeches like a little Gaul. George's instinct prompted her, as the first lesson, to get her boy used to endurance—of course, not stoical (that is the resource of those with bad teeth) but a joyous endurance. The principle of joy has been rightly vindicated by the new Schools of the West, for the last quarter of a century. But with no knowledge of pedagogy, George added to this idea of pleasure which is the fruit of the child's free spontaneous play, the virile idea of effort, which includes the necessity of difficulty in full joy. She would say to her wolf cub:

"If you do what you can, it's not enough! Every time you must do a little more than you can. Pleasure is good to suck—I don't deny it! But every calf can do that. The best thing, the really good thing, is when you begin to chew difficulty. Nothing equals that taste on the tongue. Lick your sweat! . . . A little too much.

But not too much of too much! Too much of too much is a fool's trick. Neither fool, nor calf . . . Now! Go to it! . . . Again! Again! . . . Stop! . . . Look out for breakages! . . . You will do more to-morrow . . ."

At that game, the youngster's four limbs and his casing grew bronzed. The mind lost nothing by it. George gave it the same gymnastic training. Julien's daughter skillfully wielded the bow of intelligence. Beneath her agile fingers the abstract problems of science untied themselves so simply that the little monkey's quick fingers went through the same movements, from point to point, without suspecting the difficulty. The mind's fingers forestalled thought; instinct solved the problem, before reasoning the "how." It is the right way, the straight line, the "how" will come later—after one has reached the goal. If one waited for it to be ready, before starting, the day—life—would go by! Keep marching on! "How" will catch up with us in the end . . . George communicated to Jean her intuition of mind and hand. Reasoning about it afterwards was a fine puzzle, which they amused themselves by solving over the evening meal. But in the daytime, see and act! See to act. The two movements make one, if you are healthy. We shall have plenty of time to understand! To understand? As if the eye and hand had not understood from the start! There is no need of words to think. But when it was time for words neither George nor Jean lacked them. Their tongues were not paralyzed. Ah! how they loved to argue! . . . Annette laughed as she listened to them. Even in thinking, in arguing, they seemed to be at play, using their limbs in the assault.

One may well believe that the problems of existence, the torture of which had made the former generation bleed, never made their shoes pinch! (Anyway, they

went barefoot in sandals.) In the first place, they were both, boy and girl, in excellent health. They did not know what illness was. They did not know of their own knowledge (not enough—it is a great lack!) the misery, the cruelty of the struggle for existence. If they had known it, they would probably have been ready to confront its assaults: to a George, the whole of life is a stadium. But it would be too fine if that were true! The stadium itself is a luxury. There was no disguising the fact that the life of George and the child, simple and healthy though it was, was a luxury: not the luxury of money, but of seclusion. This individualist education was apart from the common lot. Annette felt this uneasily. And Sylvie would have her clearer word to say on the subject. But she did not say it often, having but rare occasions to interfere in what went on in the house. And Annette, benumbed by a great weariness and an invincible desire for solitude in the early days of convalescence from her wound, left the management to George. To set her conscience at rest, she told herself that she would intervene a little later, and that time was not being wasted.

It was not indeed. George was beating the iron on the anvil before dipping it into the vat. Little Jean would be of solid steel. She would leave no flaws in him. None of those troubles, no flights from shadows and monsters which so often torture, unsuspected, the uneasy minds of children. Life quite clear, with no obsession of the unknown. In spite of the shock which his father's tragic disappearance might have been to Vania, he seemed not in the least preoccupied with that dark goal which awaits the runner at the end of the race. George did not worry herself about it any more than he did. Their calm assurance concerning the *Hereafter* was to Annette a relief not unmixed with amazement: she found it difficult to under-

stand. It had cost her so much pain and effort to reach acceptance, after repeated failures! They seemed to be settled in it from the start. George had taught Vania to look on death simply, as a natural act which was normal, easy and not terrifying. The girl's solid, well-ordered mind, like a well-planned house, had managed to balance the unrelenting study of medicine with the vigor of sport and the joy of a flawless body. She was endowed with a calm gayety of mind, clear and precise, which takes an interest in everything that is; and she had the secret of talking naturally to Vania of all natural questions: death, sickness, questions of sex. She never had any reticence with him, or false shame, or, on the other hand, any immodesty or license: she told him that which is. That which is, is as it is. When it is good, we have only to enjoy it. When it is bad, we must try to make it good. In either case we must not hide our eyes. We look, it is always interesting to look at. Even if the play is going on in ourselves. Especially in ourselves! Then we are the spectators and the spectacle.

"Look at your play! Don't be afraid! The actor bestirs himself. But the spectator is free to applaud or to hiss, or to yawn. If the play bores us, we are even free to cry 'Enough'!"

Vania saw untroubled the simple and bold awakening of his puberty. He was glad to be a boy. The world seemed to him a first-rate invention. How very ingenious it all was! The machinery of life obeyed clear laws. No question of rebelling against the laws. Every machine obeys its laws. One must learn to handle the machine. My body and my life are my car . . .

"Aren't they, George?"

"Yes, Vanneau, drive it well, don't run over the pedestrians! . . ."

How amusing it is to be alive! What joy to start in the cool morning on the white road, with the car all new and shining, without a speck of dust, as yet, on its beautiful fine wheels, as it flies like a bird, obedient to the lightest pressure of my hand—and beside me the companion who has already been part of the way, and who goes over it again, in order to enjoy it more completely, both together! And I, I enjoy what she has seen, what I see, and what she sees with my eyes . . .

It seemed to them that their life was complete only when they were together. Each of them, when alone, felt that there was a piece missing. That near past, of which he was the fruit—his father, his mother, and the others—how could Vania ever come to understand them, without George who had seen it all? It was as if he had sent her as a quartermaster-sergeant to reconnoiter for him. And he did no less for George: for he was perched upon her shoulders, legs pressed under her chin (dear little knees! . . .) and the sharp eyes of the watcher soared above the head of his bearer: they aimed and struck farther than hers. More than once, though he did not know it, he explained her own thought to George. She saw her way the clearer for it. Thus a curious equality was established between them, and it was often the grown-up who questioned the child:

"Tell me, Vanneau, what do you think about it? . . ."

Where she was of great help to him, was in evoking his father. He had known his father very incompletely. Marc was too taken up by his passions and his work, to give much of himself to the child. And naturally, the child had paid little attention to those passions and that work; at the time of the crisis between his parents, his memory was only just beginning to emerge from the fog; and the scraps of memories which his sparrow-eye

had picked up had remained uncoördinated. Afterwards he had got used to living his life apart from the two passionate ones, who neglected him. But now that both had been suddenly torn from him, his instinct made him feel that he was a part of them, or they of him; and he would have liked to get hold of them again. It was too late! . . . It's never too late, when the will has the resource of an imaginative mind determined to forge what it lacks. George was his assistant in forging: she unfolded the mirage of his infancy: the scenes she related of his years that had vanished, leaving no trace, projected themselves on the far background of his picture, into that unfinished horizon which expects and welcomes every vision. Before George had finished relating, all the birds which had flown from the Ark, black, and white, had found a nesting place in the bushes of Vania's memory. They even hatched their broods there. And when Vania, in his turn, repeated their story, he added to it, in all good faith. He would have been capable of saying to George:

"That's not it! I know about it better than you, George, I was there!"

Together they had little difficulty in making for themselves a glorified portrait of Marc. George was the more disposed to second the child's secret wish, in that she had known very little of Marc, and he had exercised an attraction of romantic curiosity over her, which in their brief acquaintance there had been no time to satisfy, and which had been overexcited by the tragic stir of his death. As Annette never spoke to anyone of her son, whom she kept to herself, imagination had a free hand in painting the fresco. It bloomed, in the depths of George's eyes, with a legendary color; Marc was not far from appearing in the likeness of St. George. The grave young man

of Or San Michele with steady eyes, offering his breast to the blows of fate . . . That this time he had fallen in the fray made him all the more heroic.

"And I am his son. I will avenge him. . . ."

"We will avenge him. . . ."

For since Vania was her boy now, George was the widow, who had received the ashes of the dead and the vengeance.

But the other wife? The other mother? . . . They were two. And she had to admit to herself that the other had had in Marc the better share, the share which was not legendary. (George was too sincere to delude herself, in such questions, as to the superiority of legend over the real.) But at least, as regards Vania, it was she who possessed the reality. Who leaves his place, loses it! Assia had lost it, and thank God! she seemed in no hurry to reclaim it. Her new life absorbed her. At long intervals she was seized with a fit of passionate remembrance. She would write a letter of love and remorse to Annette —a flow of lava . . . And on one occasion when the lava had crossed the sea, Assia followed the letter, and fell suddenly upon Meudon, without a word of warning. It was eleven months after her departure. But the violence of her passion wore itself out in conversations with Annette, with whom she shut herself up on her arrival. At the first shock, Vania withdrew himself with too polite politeness which cut her expansions short, and Assia was intimidated by the eyes of her child, who studied her as she talked. Yet, he was charming, affectionate, full of attentions, too many attentions! . . . But that look observed her strangely. She wanted to veil her heart with her hands. Not her heart alone! She carried another child in her womb; and though her pregnancy, skillfully disguised, was scarcely perceptible, Vania's eye

troubled her when it rested on her sides. What did he see? What did he think? She felt her modesty embarrassed, as it had never been in the presence of a man. She dared not ask him what was going on inside that head; and perhaps he would not have known himself. But at a moment when she least expected, Vania suddenly opened his mouth, and asked:

"And are you still pleased with your husband?"

She, who yet was not at all shy, lost her breath; she did not know what she answered. He continued:

"Do you love him better than daddy?"

"Oh, no!" she replied, with all her heart.

"Then, why did you marry him?"

That finished her off. She replied, in confusion:

"I could not help it . . ."

He did not insist. She was anxious for his opinion.

"You are angry with me? Tell me, did I do wrong? . . ."

"No, I understand; you can't live without a husband."

Assia felt herself in the presence of the little head of the family, who granted her his indulgence: she was both shy and mortified. She went and poured forth her bitterness into Annette's bosom. But she could blame no one. Everybody was perfectly charming to her. Even George indulged herself in the luxury of feeling sorry for her; and that was too much. George came near saying to Assia:

"Would you like to take the boy with you?"

She was so sure of keeping him.

"Sure? You are too sure! . . . I'm taking him. . . ."

Assia was on the point of seizing Vania, and saying:

"I am taking you. Come along! And this minute . . ."

But what would she have done if he had answered:

"I would rather stay here . . ."

Or even if he had taken her at her word:

"Very well! Let's start! . . ."

What would she have done with him over there, with this other child who was coming, and that other man? . . . And what would he have done over there, with his prematurely serious look and the decided line of his mouth? No, he was better here, for his own sake, and hers.

But she took her revenge on George, by denouncing the faults of the boy's education. At the first glance, her sharp eye and her jealousy had revealed them to her: he was isolated like a privileged little bourgeois (the privilege was on the wrong side, for it deprived him of the substance of common life . . .); he lacked contact with the race of other children, especially those who from their first steps have to face hard and wholesome realities. Wholesome? Unwholesome! . . . But the struggle is wholesome. She would have liked to plunge him into it. George felt her harsh censures; they roused those which Annette secretly passed on herself. The two young women argued passionately, before her; each of them defended her own thesis to the extent of ruining it by excess; and this not solely for the good of the child. George felt that at bottom Assia was right; but she did not want to give up her little companion. Fortunately, Assia's violent exaggeration furnished her with plausible pretexts to defend herself.

Just at that time, Sylvie was occupying her feverish idleness in problematical attempts at a sort of school, or colony, on the fortifications, for the little vagabonds of the district. (We will relate this escapade later.) Assia heard of it and never hesitated; in the heat of the discussion she spoke of sending Vania there. George in-

dignantly opposed it. Annette smiled. But Assia stuck to it. It was the boy who settled it. He said:

"No!"

"No, indeed?" said his mother. "I did not ask your opinion."

"But I am giving it," said the child. "And I say: 'No!'"

He shook his head with an air of decision.

Assia contemptuously called him:

"Little bourgeois!"

He clenched his fists and shouted:

"It isn't true!"

"You are afraid of dirtying yourself with the little street urchins?"

"I am not afraid of dirtying myself—with anybody! But I won't go!"

"Why?"

"I won't go."

He refused to explain. But Annette, drawing the little chap with his stubborn forehead between her knees, whispered to him:

"You do not want to go to *her*?"

He nodded with energy.

"What are you plotting together?" asked Assia.

"That's our business. We understand each other."

A few days before, Sylvie had come to the house. Luckily Assia was out. But Sylvie, who found George alone with Jean, heard from them of his mother's unexpected arrival. Sylvie was incapable of hiding her resentment. This woman, who would have let herself be cut to pieces for those she loved, would have cut to pieces those she hated—the devil knows why she sometimes loved or hated! (Enough! She knew . . .) She was implacable to the point of madness—to the point of risking poisoning the heart of this little boy, whom she loved. (To love someone does not always mean to wish what is for his good, but to wish the good that oneself wills!) Did she not go so far as to tell George, before Vania, George herself being so taken aback that she did not think of safeguarding the child, the follies of the heart which had all but laid waste the conjugal life of his parents! And of course she presented them in the light most insulting to the mother. . . . Annette came in at that moment: she caught a few words, she saw the child's pallor. Her face changed too; her eyes blazed; she seized Sylvie by the shoulder, and pushed her violently towards the door:

"Get out!"

Vania and George had never heard that voice from her. Sylvie made no answer, and departed, crestfallen. Annette shut the door upon her, nostrils quivering, and eyebrows frowning (Vania had never noticed how thick they were; they made a line above the nose). She turned and met the child's eyes. She softened instantly, she smiled, shrugged her shoulders and said:

"Well, my dears, if I were to tell you not to think about it, it would not prevent you from thinking. But do not judge! We have no right to judge. Each of us has his own joys, sorrows, follies, and reasons. Each his own burden! It is his own affair and nobody else's. Others must not be allowed to poke their noses into it! If those we love have suffered, have made mistakes, they are all the more to be pitied and loved. Let us ask pardon, if without meaning to, we have surprised their secrets!"

But Vania said, with an ugly look:

"Let *her* ask pardon!"

But *she* might have asked it! He would not have granted it. He could not forgive Sylvie; nothing would

have induced him to go to her who had insulted his mother.

By dint of pestering Annette about the child's secret, Assia learnt, in the end, in a discreet version, the cause of Vania's refusal. She affected indifference to the evil anyone might say of her; and she continued to hustle the child. But that he should have taken the offense so passionately was balm to her wounded heart. The day of her departure, passing hurriedly near Vania and seeming not to notice him, she turned back suddenly, fell upon him, and hugged him violently:

"My Marc! My Marc! . . ."

She spent her last hours shut up with Annette, kneeling before her with tears and stifled cries, pouring into that heart, which was hers, all her secrets, her regrets, her passions, all that occupied her insatiable soul. Annette's hand stroked the head of her foolish virgin, the burning forehead, the burning eyes, the burning nose that rubbed itself against her like a dog, the burning mouth, which would readily have licked her hand, if it had dared. And Assia, relieved, said:

"Can you still love me?"

"I have married you."

Assia said, ironically:

"Ah! That's no reason!"

Annette laughed:

"Not for you, bad boy!"

They embraced:

"It can't be helped, my girl!" said Annette. "If you are foolish, I am foolish too, since I love you. We must resign ourselves."

Vania and George were troubled for a few days after Assia's departure. Without clearly understanding, they felt that a soul storm had passed through their atmosphere; and their atmosphere was saturated with it for some time. George's cheeks still tingled from the dispute with Assia; but on leaving, Assia had frankly held out her hand, and said: "Thank you! . . ." looking her straight in the face. George was now torn between two regrets; she regretted that she could not take up again the struggle with Assia until she had made Assia measure her length on the ground; she passionately regretted that she had not kissed her. Vania rubbed his face which his mother's voracious mouth had devoured with kisses; and he repeated to himself the cry: "My Marc!" which had upset him. How she loved him, Marc, his father! . . . And it was Marc she embraced in him . . . He was his father then? He was Marc? Yes, he was. He would be . . .

An ardent flood of gratitude wedded him to this mother, who entrusted him with the survival of the man who was his secret cult. . . .

LXXIV

The shock of Marc's death had had a much more visible effect on Sylvie than on Annette. The blow put the last touch to her ruined health, and entirely changed her mode of life. She took a dislike to her adopted children, and declared, without a day's warning, that she was leaving them: she wanted to live elsewhere. Bernadette[1] felt bound to insist on dissuading her. Sylvie said:

"You've got my money. What more do you want?"

Bernadette turned green at this slap. She did not speak of returning the money; but she kept the mortal insult; and she said:

"Go!"

Sylvie was wrong to doubt Bernadette's affection. Her attachment was real. In spite of the lack of warmth, it was the only feeling of tenderness that moistened a little the roots of that arid soul. But self-love was the stronger. Once wounded it never forgave. Bernadette shut her door, and forbade herself to think of Sylvie in future.

And what was the cause of Sylvie's rancor? It was the terrible indifference she had seen in Bernadette after Marc's death. The indifference would have seemed more terrible still if she had known the relations which had existed between them. But who could say that she had not caught a whiff of them? Sylvie's nostrils were very keen. Sometimes, they knew more than her brains.

Sylvie's choice fell upon a little attic flat of three rooms, on the sixth floor of an old house, at a street corner of her old district, Avenue du Maine. It was an old-

[1] See "The Death of a World."

fashioned house without any modern comfort. Her friends protested. After the comfort she had been used to, she ought not to renounce her ease now, when her health was fundamentally impaired. But she was obstinate. The only concession they could obtain was that, instead of being obliged to use the service staircase with its steep steps, which alone led directly to the sixth floor, she should take the lift to the fifth, and from there, through a service door on to the other staircase, she would only have one more flight to climb. Even so, it was easier to obtain the consent of the landlord than that of the mule. Sylvie persisted out of bravado, even after the permission, in climbing the six stories, "on her light foot" as she said (she had to admit that it was so no longer!). When no one could see her, she stopped more than once, leaning against the wall, with the blood buzzing in her ears; and she even had to sit down on the stairs gasping for breath. Till the day when the swelling in her legs warned her that this little game could not go on much longer. Then she was forced to use the lift, and when she first began to do so, she had to admit *in petto* that she was very glad of it. But she took good care not to mention it to the others, and the others pretended not to know it, to spare her feelings.

People could not understand (save only Annette) this sudden mania for asceticism. It was no mania to Sylvie. Her life had been demolished, in the middle. Of all the main building, between twenty-five and fifty, nothing was left but ruins. And all the fruit of her hard work, of what use had it been? Those dearest to her had not benefited by it. As to that Bernadette! . . . Enough! Nothing is nothing. She had come back to her starting point: the lodging in the Avenue du Maine, opening on

to the long common tiled passage where Annette's impatient steps had come, one night, to fetch her.[1]

Yes, the elder sister had understood. But these are secrets of the heart, which the other heart which has understood does not try to elucidate: to every man his hiding place for humble toys: memory and dreams! If he betrayed it, even to his nearest, he would die: it is his ultimate reason for living. Annette had hers too, much deeper and more secret. Otherwise where would she have found that calmness which nothing could explain in her life widowed of her son—that calmness which Sylvie came up against with a shudder, and which would have disconcerted and irritated her, if the younger sister had not learnt, at last, thoroughly to know that soul, full of surprises? And Sylvie herself had also learnt (not without difficulty) the wisdom of being silent upon the secrets of Annette's soul, as Annette was upon Sylvie's.

Though Annette seemed less stricken than herself by Marc's death, Sylvie knew very well that it was not so. But she was not averse to attributing that advantage to herself by denying her own knowledge. Marc, gone, filled a much larger place in her than she would have thought, when he was alive. A whole past. And Sylvie who read it over from the last line to the first, found in the book now finished a much more intimate meaning than when they were writing it together. She created the illusion for herself that she had been nearer to Marc than any other human being—even his mother. (She did not mention Assia, whom she persisted in thrusting aside with irritated scorn: "You are not one of us. I deny you! . . .") She would recognize no other rival than Annette. In some respects, she was not quite lying to

[1] "Annette and Sylvie."

herself. She had been the witness, the confidante and the accomplice of a whole part of Marc's adolescent life of which he had never told his mother. He had been her half-son, her pupil, her apprentice . . . (We have not told everything of those *Lehrjahre.*) Until that mad night in the Avenue d'Antin [1] which had been followed by years of stupid misunderstanding. . . . The foreigner had taken advantage of them to take him from her. Another furious crossing out of Assia! . . . The two women had reasoned in vain against their strange jealousy; especially since their common mourning they had forced themselves in vain to kindliness and smiles; their jealousy braced them one against the other, irreconcilable and hard —especially since their common mourning. Luckily, the Atlantic ditch lay between them. When Assia crossed it, they avoided each other.

[1] "The Death of a World."

LXXV

Disencumbered of her money, of her trade, her agitated life, and of people into the bargain—of all the "others" (excepting half a dozen, who were not "others" but a part of herself), Sylvie did not feel the void for an instant. She breathed!

There are some wretched creatures (the majority in our mechanized society) who at the retiring age, when the props of habits which held up their lives are taken away, crumble away to plaster. But Sylvie was of good French stone, well cut and solidly set, like that of Chartres or Laon. She had the same close grain, hard and fine, the "ego." An ego which was her own, very much her own, her own alone. It had no need of reënforcements. When the scaffoldings that had encumbered twenty-five years or more of her life were cleared away, Sylvie found herself released, and she enjoyed the free air.

She had plenty of it, in her observatory that dominated the roofs, the waste land, the hollows and the hills covered by the swarming of the immense ant heap and the long trails of smoke curling over the town. Sylvie, having got back into her Catherinette shell, became once more a daughter of St. Catherine. She grew younger.

It was only just at first. St. Martin's summer. But those last fine days were not wasted.

First she busied herself with arranging her nest well. No luxury, but comfort. The little anchorite did not renounce the satisfaction of any greed, whether of the mouth, the hands, the seat or the loins: a good soft bed, giving well beneath the buttocks and shoulders; a carpet pleasing to the eye and the bare foot; an armchair into

which the hindquarters sank delicately; a few pieces of furniture in good wood, solid and simple, convenient, and agreeable to the touch; gay paper on the walls, and no curtains on the windows. No neighbors, nothing to hide. And if there had been neighbors, Sylvie would not have bothered about them!

"Let them feast their eyes who like! I feast mine on this beautiful little day, that comes straight in. I want to see it naked, and let it see me the same!"

She had the eyes of a hawk, hard and clear: her eyes never blinked. The head of her bed was turned to face the light—the daylight, the moonlight: she never had enough.

When her little kingdom of three rooms was arranged (her greatest luxury was flowers, she garlanded her window fronts with them, from each window they climbed on trellises above the roof), Sylvie, like the ancient barons from their vultures' nests, thought of incursions into the plain. Her craving for activity returned. It must be used without delay. She remembered an idea which had cropped up in conversation with a friend, a governess, of founding an open air school for the poor children of the faubourgs and the district. She and her friend founded it on the waste grounds of the "fortifs." In spite of her old legs, heavy to carry, she sounded the call to arms in the district. Her golden tongue, imperious and cajoling, beguiled authorities and parents. The youngsters soon came down like a flock of sparrows after crumbs (crumbs not only for the mind, but for the stomach; a good part of Sylvie's little savings had gone into the venture). Once they had found the way to pickings, they did not readily forget it. They were there from dawn to dark. It became necessary to rent rag-pickers' huts for bad weather; these

were mended up as well as possible, like old shoes; the children busied themselves in patching them. They had a good deal to do patching themselves up. Mutual aid was developed among them under the control of little overseers, male and female (no bosses!), who were consecrated heads of families, and who had to keep an eye on their clan, blow noses, wipe and mend. An attempt was made to organize workshops. Sylvie managed to enroll some helpers of good will, young men and girls bitten by social idealism (it did not last long!), old retired *petits bourgeois* who proved rather a hindrance; for the new broods were more foreign to them than natives of some other race; they no longer spoke the same language; every contact caused a shock. Here and there some workman of the district, related to the children, took advantage of a Saturday afternoon, or sick leave, to come and look round, grew interested, and gave a helping hand, or an object lesson. But he was a rare bird; the working man does his job and sows his seed; when both are done, he loses interest, he needs to forget.

Money ran short, the little mouths were a gulf, and the word of God, or of Sylvie, does not fill empty stomachs! Sylvie stinted her own food to distribute it to her birds, but she was not a Vincent de Paul: she would not have stripped herself to clothe the naked; even the half of St. Martin's cloak was a good deal! "I do not cut it higher than my backside!" The good sense of the Gaul did not forsake her. Between the pelican that feeds its young with its blood, and Ugolino who eats them to preserve them a father, there is room for the good Samaritan of Montparnasse who feeds herself first and then others. . . . "A fine advantage to them when they have eaten me! And who will feed them to-morrow? The God who takes care

of the sparrows? . . ." Sylvie had fallen out with that God, since he had killed her sparrow, or allowed him to be killed. She had sent Him to Coventry. She never set foot in church now. Her school was now her church, and her impiety insolently boasted that she gave more of her body to her children to eat than did the God of the Host.—"A fine meal! I feed them better." But she did not take herself in, she knew that she did not feed them enough! She went and begged, imperatively, for her scholars, from everybody she knew, and many whom she did not know. Her bad legs did not benefit by all the stairs she made them go up and down. The result was that after no mediocre harvest (there were not many among those solicited who dared to haggle over the alms which the redoubtable little beggar exacted from them!) Sylvie had to condemn herself to lie still in bed for weeks.

To occupy herself, she took five or six of her most promising girls into her house, and gave them sewing lessons. The first results were satisfactory: fingers are nearly always intelligent in Paris, and would to heaven the rest was the same! But there were serious drawbacks. The little girls were crowded into the three rooms; the invalid could not keep them under constant supervision; they scratched the furniture with their clogs, dog's-eared the papers with their nails, left the marks of their dirty fingers on the woodwork, and slyly picked the flowers from the windows, breaking the stems. Finally, Sylvie discovered one day that they had been rooting in her drawers, and that a lacquer box had been stolen. Apart from the value of the souvenir, Sylvie could not put up with being robbed. The old instinct of property would admit of no infringement. It was very unlikely that she would ever reach the stage when one says: "Take what you like! Nothing

is mine."—She said: "I give, *because it is mine.* But I forbid you to put your claws on it without my leave, damned thief!" She flung them all out.

In the meantime, while she was in bed, the school, deprived of her oar, capsized. She got herself more talked about than was desirable. Some of the little heads of families, overseers male and female, took their parts too seriously, or, if you like, on the least serious side. There were certain games between the paired-off boys and girls, which were not in the program.

"Nothing to make a fuss about!" said Sylvie when she heard of it. . . . She would have gone as far as spanking. . . .

"But let them leave us in peace, with this nonsense. Pack of beadles! Do they suppose that we are training a lot of choir boys? Just try to keep our puppies of the district on a chain! I train them at liberty. It can't be done without scratches. They can be cured. Don't make such a to-do!"

They knew very well what they were about! The bourgeois press, which already had its eye on the suspected nest of anarchists, sounded the alarm that the morality of Paris was menaced. There was an inquiry, examination of the little scamps, less frightened than proud of seeing themselves in the papers; they exaggerated their exploits. Indignant chorus of parents and the honest gallery. . . . Invalid Sylvie, summoned to appear, gave the magistrate a dressing down. He did not take it well, as may be supposed. If she got off scot-free, it was not being in the right that helped her but rather the holes that she herself had made in the cloth of "virtue" in her day. For some among her friends were in the Palais; and her friends were never ungrateful (it is the greatest art in a

woman; Sylvie had been an expert in it). The case against her was dismissed; but the school on the "fortifs" was closed. There remained the ditches for the puppies to carry on their capers. It was a great victory for morality.

LXXVI

The adventure disgusted Sylvie with her crusade for social action. Had she been younger she would have held out against her opponents, and begun over again. But when your own limbs play you false the game is up! One must, at least, have one's Old Guard to form the square at Waterloo. No one was left but the general. She said her say, and turned her back—the lower part of her back—on society.

She still had her own society. It was enough.

How strange it is! She found that her real life began in the hour when she had cast everything away. . . . And though it was not mentioned between them, her elder sister made the same discovery, but more startling and crueler, after she had lost her son. . . .

At that moment ordinary souls have nothing left to keep them alive, they pass out. But there are some who find themselves, in that moment when they have no further ties—even of the most sacred affection. Then they are born anew, they begin a period of unexpected activity. A powerful inner life rose in Annette, the rays of which spread gradually, with invincible sweetness. Sylvie, who had not this beacon on the ocean, lit her warm lantern in the falling dusk. Was she then a soul above the ordinary, which finds itself, as has just been said? "Soul," what a pretentious word! She would have flung it back in your face. . . .

"I, stark naked . . . I, who am going . . . I who am going to leave all this . . . All this? What? Myself. All that is in me, of which I have made nothing. . . . To think that I did not even know I had it! . . .

How I must have wasted my time! Let's be quick and seize it, carry it off with our sheets, in our clutched talons! It would be terrible, when the express has started, to have left one's best on the platform, to have brought one's purse, and forgotten one's life. . . ."

Yet the little Paris glutton thought that she had gorged herself with that life. She thought she had tasted the choicest morsels. She left the table, full of heaviness. The smell of the food and cigar ash sickened her. . . . And now, here was a window opening, fresh air, and youthful hunger coming back to her. . . .

What a curious adventure! To fill up the yawning boredom of her evenings (in truth the anticipator had dreaded their coming rather than yet experienced the yawns) she had installed a wireless set. At first she had splashed about haphazard in the frog pond: the croakings from Rome to Toulouse and from the Eiffel Tower to Bratislava, had seemed to her a good joke; she amused herself by mixing up their belches and hiccoughs like a child messing about with mud and water. This hubbub suited her humor, and her Parisian craving for noise.—"Without noise, how can you know you are alive? . . . But when she had proved her existence to herself by the din, she soon got tired. Without shutting off the instrument her nervous finger had impatiently turned the knob to silence. She was sitting there in her armchair near the window, alone in her room, in the first hours of the night. And the great darkness which the noise had put to flight, finding the place free, fell again into the depths of the soul. The deafened soul began to hear again the pain crouching in the old limbs and in the heart. She was taken unawares; she could not move, and the chill of night fell upon her shoulders. She was poor, naked, and wounded. She was waiting for the *coup de grâce*.

And it was grace that came to her. From a dark corner of the room behind her, marvelous music began to flow. It poured forth in great waves, strong and calm, which slowly bathed the poor swollen feet, slowly rose round the legs, round the thighs, round the loins; the flesh felt a thrill like a long tremor in the forest, and the mysterious voice of sex rose like a call from the heart of the woods. The chant, the lament and the ecstasy spread gradually to the whole body, bathing the breasts and shoulders; and then the dry burning mouth drank of it. And the forehead was the last summit reached by the flood. The great waves of music only reached the brain when all the body was drowned in it. With others the head is the door to the heart. But Sylvie drew all her knowledge from her roots—from her flesh.

And when, at last, above the flooded expanse, the summit began to wake, Sylvie, invaded, became conscious, like Danaë, of the cloud of gold that enwound her, penetrating by every pore. Never had she known such an embrace. And in ecstasy, with parted lips, she stretched out her arms to the Lover.

Of course, she never knew the name of the work which had possessed her. She had scarcely any notion of that kind of music—of the symphony and its voices of a hundred instruments. To her there was only one voice, but it was the whole being that spoke, not in the worn-out words of speech, but in unexpressed quiverings of all the branches of the great tree which holds the torrent of life between its walls of silence. And who was speaking? Who was that being?—Herself! . . .

Sylvie was thunderstruck by the discovery of such a source of unknown emotions, and the realization that the source was in herself. For she did not trouble to consider that the music was the work of musicians. The identity of the musical phrase with her own substance and of the beats of that flood with those of her blood—that miracle perceived in every concert hall, by every listener elected by grace of the heart—was much more peremptory in the solitude of that room, where the bare walls echoed the awaited voice of the inner worlds. So long silent! Ignored. . . . And how express in words what it said?

"My God, my God! I cannot understand. But I know that you speak truth, you enter into my most secret depths, which no eye has ever seen—even my own—and my whole being vibrates beneath your finger, like a string awakening from a whole lifetime of sleep. Again! Again! . . ."

She tried to make it speak again on the following evenings. But she had disappointments. The instrument, still imperfect, and the capricious waves, answered the call irregularly, and the answer was fantastic. Sylvie, with nothing to guide her, endeavored with furious fingers to extricate from the unspeakable medley, in which North and South squalled head over heels, the magic bird whose call had awakened her. But she more often hit upon the advertisements shouted by the man of Toulouse, or the nerveless, savorless jazz of some dance band. When, by chance, she caught the bird again, it left two or three feathers in her hand, and escaped into the forest; or some monster arose and trampled it underfoot. Swearing like a trooper, Sylvie shoved the squalling animal back into the abyss. But the satisfaction (it was one!) of squeezing the throats of these calves did not compensate her for the loss of the bird. After weeks of pursuit, the little Argonaut perceived that the surest way to capture her Colchis was not to wait for it to surrender to her, but to invade it *manu militari*—by her supple imperious hand.

At past fifty, she learnt to play the piano. It was not

her nature to remain passive in anything whatever, even, and above all, in enjoyment. If she adopted music it must be active. She put her customary energy into it.

She told no one about it. But one day Annette, climbing to the sixth floor, opened her eyes wide when she discovered a piano in a corner of the room. She was too shrewd to tease her Sylvie about it. But she could not conceal her surprise, and Sylvie forestalled her:

"Yes, I have taken to that tool there. It's a whim. You must be laughing! But at my age, one does not mind ridicule. One does what one likes."

"You always did that, at all ages, my beauty," said Annette. "And it is not at your present age that I would find fault with you about it. I laugh, but with pleasure that you should find pleasure in that toy."

Sylvie's brow cleared:

"Between fools, we understand each other."

"By dint of living, we have taken color from each other."

"I had not enough follies of my own, I've taken yours."

"Be easy!" said Annette. "I have some left!"

She offered discreetly to give Sylvie music lessons. But Sylvie would accept only a little elementary guidance and refused access to her territory. Her susceptibility, always on guard, was conscious of her ignorance and she wanted to be able to stumble at her ease, without being spied upon by any eyes—even (above all) the most intimate. For indispensable advice she preferred to have recourse to anonymous paid help.

Her only knowledge of music had been some idea of solfeggio, learnt in a few popular classes in her youth, after the Galin-Paris-Chevé method. The classes had been intermittent; in those days the little gutter-cat had other music to occupy her nights. And as to songs of the

street and the workroom, a Parisian girl has no need to learn them on paper. Her ear and voice were true and sharp: faun above and faun below. Even to the fine lower lip, like the mouthpiece of a reed, thrust forward to bite her thread or to emit the shrill note of a little flute. And over and above an unshakable memory. Never a tune once heard that did not stick. Twenty years later she could have recognized the air among a hundred others. Her ear had been shaped by Annette, in the happy days in the old Bourgogne house, when the older sister let her fingers dream over the keyboard. Those dreams, which Sylvie used to laugh at then, without understanding them, had entered her dovecote; not understanding did not prevent her from taking; Sylvie never let anything be wasted, dreams or ribbons; she picked them up and tidied them away: "They will be no use."—"One never knows." There is always a moment when they come in handy. Later on, in the days of her splendor, she had had concerts in her house. Of course they were the ear-splitters of the latest fashion, the atonalisms in vogue. She understood nothing of them, and in her heart she laughed at all the trouble the good boys took to split one's ears. But by a curious instinct, these organized noises neither bored nor drowned her; she swam in them, like a blind fish which lets itself be carried comfortably along in the dark and beats the stream with its tail; the world of sound was a natural element to her. When the occasion presented itself, she moved about in it, with closed eyes, without collisions.

Never suppose that she listened! It was herself she heard. Music made her fit and lively, it stimulated her activity. Others march in step, to go and get themselves killed, to the irresistible rhythm of drums and trumpets. With Sylvie, it was the brain that trotted. Her brain

was never more "going," precise, practical, prompt and clear than when she was listening (not listening) to music. She had even made out her monthly accounts during a Beethoven symphony! . . . Good people, I see you sticking out your lip. Do not, from your heights, pity Sylvie's musical infirmity too much! She made better use of music than many of your own kind who know it theoretically and listen to it unmoved, as cold mathematics. Without her thinking of it, music filtered into her, like a leaven, and incorporated itself with her blood; it was transmuted into energy. It is not the least marvelous alchemy. Many ignorant people, whom those of the profession despise, unknowingly practice this alchemy; and certain members of the profession would find great difficulty in doing likewise.

But until now, Sylvie had never had time to reflect upon the currents of her actions: she acted, she ran about. Now that she was forced to sit down—to sit on the bank of her stream—she heard it singing. And she set herself to distinguish the meaning of what it had been saying to her from her childhood; she had never been able to hear it before, because she had been speaking at the same time.

She kept silence. . . . To keep silence was a science, an art (whichever you like!) that had always been unknown to Sylvie. She acquired it. What a discovery! Silence—the most populous of harmonies. . . . The ripe womb swollen with the children of our desires. . . . Sylvie guarded the flocks of her dreams. . . . Then she learned, with stumbling finger on the keyboard, to bring to life the ordered throbbing of those embryonic beings. Their silhouettes, grave or frivolous, passed along the keys, robed in trains of harmony. And between one and another, attractions or conflicts were set up. But neither the former nor the latter were enacted on a stage exterior

to the eyes. They were inscribed on the other side of the screen, as if they were projected by the mind. It was oneself one played—one wandered about in it.

It was a question of finding the way.

Patiently the impatient one submitted to elementary lessons in the back shops of piano sellers, where the rumbling of motor-buses in the narrow street made the cases of the instruments vibrate. She practiced in her attic for hours, from old "methods," bought at bargain prices from a bookseller in the district. With cool persistent tenacity she harnessed her ten fingers to the wheel of scales rolling up and down; and the passing of the thumb was to her, for some weeks, the "to be or not to be." For a Sylvie there was no doubt about the answer. A pretty thing if her hands would not obey her will! The supple, patient, cunning hands of a girl of Paris, proficient in all the games of life, of the toilet, her trade, and love. . . . Age had no hold on them. And the very difficulty was a charm to them. But it is open to doubt that the charm was shared by the next door neighbors. That was the least of her cares!

She also found the way to concerts. She went in the cheap seats. In the first place for lack of money. But equally by taste, for she was at her ease only among the young people, and those from whom Art and its pleasures exact sacrifice: they are the only ones who know how to enjoy it; they do not dip the tip of their tongue or a bored finger in it, like the blasé folk in the boxes; they dive in head first; and come up with eyes starting out of their heads. Sylvie's eyes were like that, at certain parts of *The Damnation*, and Beethoven's finales. At the last chord, her feet were tapping the floor. And her amused neighbors called each other's attention to the little imperious woman, her face distorted by emotion, who pawed

the ground, breathing heavily through her nose. She seemed to see nothing. The orchestra and choirs played for her alone. The rest of the audience did not exist. She would have found it quite natural to call out to the conductor: "Begin over again!" This was hers, she had the right to dispose of it. . . . That flood of anger, those transports, or that languor, that voluptuousness. . . . "Mine, mine! . . ."

"Begin over again! . . ."

She called it out once, with a voice and gesture of command. People round her laughed. They clapped her. She stared at them. Then awaking from her dream, she exchanged a wink and an understanding smile with her neighbors. In reality, they all felt as she did. They were all of the family. Whose? The family of him who was speaking for them: whether he was called Berlioz, Beethoven, or Wagner, the name made little difference to the thing. What counted was the family, themselves. When they cried: "Bravo!" it was theirs. And Sylvie was their leader.

She was known to the galleries now; and her legend had gone round. When she came hesitatingly down the top steep stairs, several young girls hastened to assist her, or a very courteous lad, stiff and embarrassed, respectfully supported her by the arm. Her hour of celebrity, forgotten in the world of ephemera—that All-Paris of the demi-monde,—had still a phosphorescence in the shadow of the little people who sat up near the roof. In the imagination of these youngsters she was still the old Queen of Sheba—empress of dressmaking, the magician of *fêtes galantes*—Sylvie . . . the name evoking fairy scenes à la Watteau. . . . They made a little court for her, as she came downstairs, but prudently, at a distance from the privileged one who was given the honor of holding, not

her train, but her wrist: for she had a brusque and disconcerting fashion of staring at them, or replying to their amiabilities; and when she reached the foot of the stairs, she dismissed them all with a brief peremptory gesture. Sylvie needed no crutches for walking. And she could not bear to have her thoughts disturbed on leaving the concert hall.—However, after she had shaken off her suite, she had a teasing good-natured laugh for the little people, the youngsters she had just been bullying.

She came home alone. And in the cold room, before taking off her hat, she went and groped at the piano, seeking the traces on the moss of the beautiful bare feet of the melody which had just trodden on her heart. And in her fashion, which distorted the exact line and the true meaning, she often succeeded in adapting them to her need. After all, was it not thus that the young prince of artists, Raphael, copied and distorted the Ancients? What we love well, we make our own, we eat it. Beware of respect! It loves too much! It is not enough!

LXXVII

Her way of living was now reduced as much as possible. She dispensed with a servant. And her expenses were restricted. Apart from a few infractions of the strictest law of economy, at long intervals, to satisfy a fit of greediness (one never quite renounces one's delicate French palate) or the other luxury of fine linen against the skin (it was the last pleasure Sylvie denied herself), she lived like a little nun. It might be said that she had made a virtue of necessity. For the small capital left to her, after she had despoiled herself of most of her income for her adopted children and her good works, was just enough to provide her with the independence of an anchorite. But it was all she needed now. And by an unperceived inner working, the free girl, who had gorged herself without restraint on all the fruit in her garden of desires, now found her pleasure in her enforced poverty. "Virtue" had now become "Necessity" to her. It was like the pleasure of nudity. There was still sensuality, under all this despoilment. Could anything not be sensual with Sylvie? Even to absolute renunciation! (Did she differ much in this from many ascetics?)

But she avoided admitting any witness to her modest dwelling, which became poorer every six months: for she sold pieces of furniture one after the other, to gratify the caprices of her last master and lover: Music. She had not renounced pride. She was happy in her poverty but as a strictly personal matter. She did not choose to have other people's noses poking themselves into it, turning up, wriggling with an air of indiscreet pity. Pity was an

article of which Sylvie stocked little in her shop, and she absolutely refused to accept it from others.

"Keep your pity, my friend!"

This touchy pride was still the least motive of her voluntary seclusion. The real motive was that she liked it. Sylvie would never have made a sacrifice that did not please her. Pleasure was, and remained, her law. She was a cat. And like a cat, after running about the tiles all night she sought some piece of furniture in a corner to go to sleep on. One envies cats their slumbers—deep, soft, interminable, impenetrable! . . . They realize a Paradise surer than that promised us in Scripture. . . . To sleep, to sleep . . . *"perchance to dream. . . ."* She certainly dreamed, Sylvie the cat! She had never dreamed much before (she had never had time, she strode from desire to deed); she indulged herself in dreams now! Enough for all the arrears of her past life, and for all future lives. . . . She would have been sorely puzzled to relate her dreams. (Who can indeed? We only catch a few crumbs, which we roll between our fingers. . . .) But she was ringing with them, like a steeple, and she felt the vibration to her very feet.

A whole rich inner life which she had never made use of before revealed itself to her—a life of the heart, a life of the senses (little of the intelligence, for though she had enough and to spare, it was never abstract, but always precise, practical, and "applied"). This life was not new. It had been amassed by the days. But it was as if, until then, she had kept it hidden away in her drawers, or in cardboard boxes at the back of her cupboard. Sylvie had opened the cupboard. And now she spent days and days tidying them. Tidying them? . . . Untidying them! . . . She caught herself drowsing with her dreams on her knees, and all around scattered on the floor,

dreams and dreams. . . . She picked up one, dropped it, took another, took up the first again, with no clear recollection that she had already taken and left it. . . . When she perceived it, she gayly abused herself:

"Little cow in the meadow, chewing the cud of what she has chewed ten times already. . . ."

It was not much use; the next moment she relapsed into her torpor of digestion and rapture. . . . It was a very happy state.

It was a dangerous state. Her brain became congested. The blood rushed to her cheeks, forehead and eyes. She became aware of it from pains in her head. Her fingers could feel little balls throbbing in the arteries of her neck. She knew very well that sitting still all day beside an overheated stove, with that other stove in her brain, was not good for a person like herself, who had always led an active life. But . . .

"I don't care a hoot! . . ."

Happen what might, she would do just as she pleased, as she always had done. Those who came to see her—George or Annette—scolded her. It was like falling rain! No one had ever had any influence over her.

After a few slight attacks of giddiness—one more serious, in which she struck her forehead on the red-hot stove (she told nobody about it)—she adopted a few remedies: she purged herself and put mustard plasters on her feet. But she made no change in her way of living.

And once, after days of nearly fasting (through lassitude, indifference, laziness, the bother of going up and down stairs), she had a sudden fit of hunger in which stomach and palate demanded their revenge and she broke her Lenten fast with a plateful of oysters, some *foie gras*, a Camembert, and some Vouvray.—It was lucky for her that her door onto the staircase had been carelessly left

open that day and that the concierge had to bring up a letter for her and walked in. She found Sylvie collapsed in an armchair, her head hanging over her shoulder, her body slipping onto the floor. Sylvie had just had a stroke. There was a doctor living in the house. Medical aid was immediately forthcoming; and Sylvie had already recovered consciousness (she pretended that she had never lost it) when Annette, who had been summoned, arrived.

Annette declared that since Sylvie was incapable of looking after herself, her living in a corner alone was not to be tolerated any longer. Annette would seize her and carry her off, and she would be kept chained in Annette's home. Annette, for the occasion, had put on her "Madam, I command" face of the old days. Sylvie smiled, attempted to protest for form's sake, but her tongue did not move easily, she assumed an air of Innocence subjected to Force, which submits without resistance, but calls the gods to witness. She was, *in petto*, very glad. Annette's genuine indignation, her air of authority, and the affectionate grasp of her hands, had just called to mind the good old days, when once before the elder sister had come to the little sick modiste in her garret, and carried her off. And at the same moment Annette, bending over Sylvie, saw in her eyes a picture of the former carrying off. Their laughing eyes met.

"My little old lady," said Annette, "are you back again at twenty?"

"How can you say so?" said Sylvie, pointing in the mirror to her red face and stout figure. "When I was page to the Duke of Norfolk. . . ."

"Quail! little quail!" said Annette, kissing her. "The fatter she is, the nicer she is to eat. . . ."

"Carry her off then, and let her be roasted! I am good for nothing now but to be spitted on God's spit."

LXXVIII

But she obstinately refused to leave Paris. . . .

"I was planted there. If you unpot me I shall shrivel up. Don't talk of expatriating me! Even in the suburbs, even in your Meudon, my eyes look for the Eiffel Tower, when I go for a walk. Once beyond the circle, and I feel I am already in a foreign land. The first return train that passes fills me with longing. One can breathe only in Paris. I'll die there, with open mouth; and may its good smell and good noise fill all my gullet! . . ."

As Annette would not force her, nor leave her alone in that state, she arranged to stay in Paris, in the Davys' flat which George put at her disposal in Julien's absence. They installed themselves there together. George and Vania stayed in the house at Meudon, and paid them a visit once or twice a week; Annette went to them on other days; and the telephone carried good-morning and good-night from the house in the streets to the house in the woods. Such an arrangement, which was not free from drawbacks, or from fatigue for Annette, could only be provisional. But so was Sylvie's life. The two sisters had no illusions upon that point: but they thought of it as little as possible. From day to day! Sylvie, naturally, was the one who cared least. She was also the greedier for each day. So much gained! At night, before going to sleep she recapitulated the hours that had just gone by:

"Another one that the Prussians won't have! . . ."

And next day, on waking up, feeling the ground, she said, surprised and pleased:

"It's beginning again. . . ."

She slept in a corner room looking out on the crossing

of two streets. She would not have the best room, which was George's, looking onto a garden. She must have her Paris under her feet. Her sister's room was opposite, on the other side of the corridor. They left their doors open. From one bed to the other, across the channel, they wound off their past lives. Annette, of herself, would certainly not have begun it, she would have kept the whole skein. It was Sylvie who, as she could not occupy her nimble fingers, turned the spindle, especially towards dawn, when she emerged from the gulf of congested sleep; she began by chirping, with uncertain tongue, like a child still half asleep. Annette laughed in her bed, as she heard her sister humming or reciting a story with no head or tail. Sylvie held dialogues with herself, sometimes delivering to herself a sharp and droll rejoinder; she was taken aback herself by it; some of them cut her short. Then Annette called out:

"Bravo! You're floored!"

Or, if she continued silent, Sylvie could stand it no longer, and sighed softly:

"Annette, are you asleep?" In a tender, cajoling, suppliant, impatient voice, which whispered not so low, then not low at all, and finished by exploding:

"Good-morning, good-morning, say good-morning to me! Are you asleep, Annette? You're not asleep. You're laughing at me. . . . Damn you! I'll pull your ears. . . ."

Annette grumbled:

"Lie down! Can't you keep still! . . ."

"Ah!" said Sylvie, reassured, "that does me good! My Annette is lowing. We are still in the field of the living. . . ."

But sometimes, her anxiety at the silence was shown in a more distressing manner. When she came out of those

pits of sleep, that swallowed her like a lesser death, she was not quite sure that she was still alive. But more and more, as her store of energy grew smaller, she seemed on awaking like a warm cistern of affection, which needed to spend itself, and needed to drink affection in return. There were certain accents that Annette could not resist. She got out of bed and went and put her arms round her younger sister's neck, below the fat nape. The heavy Bath-sheba body was overwhelmed by torpor. And the heavy bosom was wet with perspiration. The breathing was a little hoarse. But Sylvie had retained her slender wrists, and her beautiful face, more beautiful when illuminated by a warm smile.

She was hardly ever melancholy about the past. She moved with surprising tranquillity among the catastrophes of their two lives. She reminded her sister of the death of her own little girl; but there was no bitterness in the recital; she stroked Annette's hand all the time she was talking of it, with a strange gentleness. This calmness was a great blessing to Annette. Sylvie awed her then. Annette looked at her with respect, but her heart sank. When one has reached that stage of detachment, the last bonds will not hold much longer. . . .

They still held, though. Sylvie remained attached to her earth. She could never lose touch with it at any moment. She was not, like Annette since Marc's death, disenchanted with illusion, and capable, as Annette was afterwards, of walking on that sea without sinking in it. A foretaste of death, given her by a fresh warning of her malady, caused her a sudden terror. She had a violent fever, a stupor in which consciousness persisted, paralyzed, as in the insect described by Fabre that sees itself eaten alive and disappearing bit by bit but is unable to move. She could not understand what was happening. She lost

her footing. A world empty of the forms which had filled her little universe had no meaning for her. She had to have her Sylvie, her Annette, her Marc. . . . If they should escape her! . . .

"But what is it? But what is it?"

It made her lose her bearings. It left a shiver in her which she tried to put out of her head.

Only once, a cry of dismay and love broke from her:

"Ah!" she cried suddenly, one night—and she dropped everything she held in her hands—"Ah! May there be somewhere, over there, in that Nothingness, some place where we meet those we have loved again, and can tell each other, at last, all the love that we have not told each other here!"

Annette was moved. For once, just this once, the dry, ironical, practical nature had betrayed the depths of wild tenderness it had repressed all its life. After a long silence (she had been dreaming), Annette said:

"Don't you sometimes get the impression that among those we would wish to meet again, there are others besides those we have met in this life?"

This unexpected question struck Sylvie. She said:

"How did you manage to think of that? Actually I suppose I had never thought of it before you said it. But since you said it, I seem to have been thinking of it. But what is it? What do you believe?"

Annette passed her hand above her eyebrows:

"I can't remember."

"How strange it is! Who knows? We have lived more than one life."

Sylvie mused, then spoke imploringly:

"My little one, my big sister, we will meet again in the next life?"

"Are you so keen on a next one?"

"I am keen on meeting you again. . . ."

She added, very weary:

"But after a good sleep. For we have worked hard! . . ."

She, the indefatigable, was not discouraged, but weary and delivered over to devastating nature, like a plant in the last sunny days, in the haze of late autumn. She said to Annette, thinking of Marc, when they had just been talking of the storm hanging over Europe, and the dangers of the morrow:

"It's better that we should be leaving nobody behind us. . . ."

Annette did not think so; but she deemed it useless to express her thoughts; she laid her hand tenderly on her sister's head:

"And the child?" she asked.

True, Sylvie had forgotten him! But he got on so well without them! She realized that he might have said:

"You can go! Don't worry! I remain. . . ."

Yet she could not leave him without regret. She would have liked to take all her own folk with her. Certainly, not out of cowardice. It was because she would no longer be there to defend them. So long as she was there, however weary she might be, sorrow and danger would have her to deal with!

She would not stay in bed during the day. Even in the most overwhelming fatigue, she would consent only to the armchair. And in spite of prohibitions, she dragged about, up and down the stairs twenty times a day, for a trifle, some toy which the child scarcely noticed. All Sylvie's blandishments were wasted on him.

"Little wretch! We don't count now," Sylvie muttered between her teeth. "Don't you know that I might have laid you?"

"What are you muttering?" asked Annette.

"A bit of mischief of the old days."

"Those grapes are gathered."

"But the vat of wine is fermenting. We will draw it in paradise."

"You expect to take your vat with you, up there?"

"Most certainly. And my thin wine too. We will drink it with the Old Man."

"Who?"

"The good God."

"Aren't you ashamed of yourself?"

Sylvie was not ashamed; she joked with the Old Man. She thought He was quite pleased at it. In truth, she was not at all sure that He existed. It did not worry her. Like the usual Parisian hoyden, she had never taken the trouble to clear up her uncertainty in which popular Voltairianism was blended with the faith of a coal-heaver. Alone together, the two sisters understood each other so well! It was the essential thing to both. The rest was really of so little importance! . . . Not: "What do I know?" but: "What do we know?"

"Believe, if you like, if it does you good! And doubt too, it does no harm! . . . Even if there was someone up there, what offense could it be to Him? He is knowing enough to understand. He will laugh kindly with us . . . (as you do, Nanette! . . .). *Credo* . . . 'I believe.' . . . If He's keen on it! I refuse Him nothing. . . . Come in, Lord! I leave the key in the door, and I trust, and go to sleep. . . . If, in my night, no one comes in, well, Nanon, I'll sleep. . . . It's good to sleep, it's good to love. . . . And all is good to me. Not I, but you, Lord, choose! . . ."

It was the evening of that day which was chosen.

In spite of protests, Sylvie had done nothing but move

about all the afternoon. And still, at that hour, instead of lying down, she kept on her feet, leaning against the window-ledge. She leaned forward, breathing in the smell of her Paris, the dust and the noise, the tar between the wooden pavements, the last rays of the sun that warmed her face, and the clusters of acacia from the next garden. She was humming a song. She cried, "Ah!" very softly; it seemed like a note of her song. Annette, looking up, saw her sister falling. She sprang forward, just in time to catch her in her arms. She, herself, weakened and unsteady, staggered under the weight. The little quail was heavy, and she fell like a dead weight, as if the sportsman's shot had brought her down. Annette, kneeling down, laid her on the floor. Sylvie was looking at her, but already from afar. Annette, bending over her moving lips, drank from them, with her eyes rather than her lips, a murmur of farewell:

"Annette, my love. . . ."

The eyes swam. A swallow passed chirping, near the window. Above the motor-horns, in the distance, as in that other night, sounded the goatherd's little flute. . . . Last pictures that danced, swirled, and ran together in the mirror. A goat climbed a narrow street of old Montmartre. . . . And what was at the top? Sylvie had no time to find out. She died climbing . . . without knowing she was dying.

LXXIX

It was Marc who died once more with Sylvie. It was much more; it was Annette—forty years of life. The last witness of all our days is gone. If she is gone, are we quite sure those days have been?

Yes, there is the child—the child of the child—flesh of my flesh—the fruit of the sea, which the sea in receding has left upon the shore. . . . But where is the sea? Where am I, myself? . . . The distant murmur of the sea. . . . The shore is empty. The sand is smooth. The salt wind passes, lord of the expanse. . . . It brings a terrible rapture, which it is seemly to hide. . . .

A Japanese friend told me that in Tokio, the day after the earthquake, he met a friend who, like Count Chiarenza, had lost all he possessed, fortune and family; he expressed his pity. The other smiled a strange smile, and said: "Oh! one feels so lightened! . . ."

The whole covering of life has fallen off. One is left naked. But who is that "*One*"? . . . Bruno would say the mystic word of India "*Om*," the All, the Nothing, which are perhaps the two faces of the One. . . .

But whatever he may be, nothing or all, he is the lord of space, he is the salt wind that passes. And the more one is alone, the nakeder one is (and under-foot one can feel the cold sand of the seashore), the stronger blows the wind. It blows in you. It carries you off, dispersing the rags of your robe of the past. It takes possession of you, it breaks down the door, it breaks down the wall of the house, it penetrates to the center, you belong to it, you are it, the life of the world flows within you.

LXXX

But what can one do when sickness, from year to year, from month to month, shuts you within a smaller circle, your garden, your house—when it cuts you off from action? How ironical! When the great life outside inundates you, when you are submerged to the point of being unable to breathe, where are you to pour forth this flood of the earth? Write? The flood could not succeed in dripping through the narrow point of a pen . . . Annette had never been a great writer—except to her son and to those she loved: she needed to see the face whose eyes would read her letters. She could not write to the Anonymous; she needed direct contact with the crowd; and that contact was now denied her.

She had to keep still, but the inner flood beat under her breasts, and in the flesh of her fingers. Music, long neglected and sleeping in the depths of her flesh, took the first place again for a time. It was the hole made by the flood in the dam of the mind; it was the great rapids. Annette spent hours at the piano, enchanting her fingers and her mind with the mysterious associations of the chords which flow forth from the depths of being inaccessible to the eye of words, the waves of the inner life. Less frequently, she practiced some sonata or other with George, who was a good violinist; but they were both too independent to be able to feel together, to keep in step. Each of them had a tendency to improvise on the written work; to rewrite it with her own rhythm. A connoisseur would have been severe. But "connoisseurs" are rarely such in the Biblical sense. They do not

take the work to bed with them. True music is an embrace.

The embrace was now too much for Annette, and this last muscular activity was almost forbidden her: she gave herself to it, as she did in everything, without stint, and pain warned her too late. She had to close her piano. Hardened to pain by habit, rather than by nature (she was not of those who brave it out of pleasure, pride, or virtue), she knew how to come to terms with it; she accepted it, when she had to; but she accepted its warnings. The ivory keyboard was silent: but Annette's fingers ran over that of the mind all the better. From that time, her days and nights bathed in continuous music. The flight of hours, the flux of time, went by in liquid sheets of a symphony in which there flowed in counterpoint all the emotions of the day, great and small: the child's laughter, as well as the savage echo of the struggle of peoples, and the springtime awakening of nature. She saw herself weaving a piece of tapestry. It was not she who had conceived it, she had not drawn the cartoon; she had not collected the variegated silks. She was like the shuttle and the hand weaving the enchanted web. The hand is blind, and yet it sees; it feels the hidden whole of the harmony which is being realized under its fingers; it feels the warm vitality added by every fresh touch to the picture preëxisting in the mind. And under the obedient fingers, the preconceived work takes birth and extends every moment, from mesh to mesh. All that is, is part of it. The tragedies and tempests of history are its reds, blacks, and gold.

But what was her share in all this, her personal work? Was she no more than an instrument? She had not attained to that degree of detachment. So long as one lives and is a woman, one needs to brood and give birth,

body or spirit: to feel one's milk flowing into another mouth, and one's blood into other veins, to transmit one's life, and ray forth the dream of one's action. . . .

Only burn! Not a flame is lost in the darkness. . . . At that moment she was contemplating Cassiopeia from her window, wide open to the summer night. And she religiously repeated the ancient saying of Egypt:

"Grant that I may become like the constellations."

But her wish was humbler. The constellations are too far off, too high! It was enough for her to be set in the most modest constellation here below.

She never suspected that she herself was a constellation.

LXXXI

She was not alone. Side by side, in the very web she was weaving, the child Vania wove his dream. Healthy throughout, without blemish, joyous, active, well balanced, in spite of his daily life, full as an egg, he had his inner dream woods and valleys. And his cisterns, of which the bottom will never be known. He dived in head first, without anyone noticing the dive. Not George, for all her swimming prizes, could have fished him up. She scarcely noticed his absence. She was speaking to him. He was far away. . . . When he returned, she no more perceived that he had come back than she had perceived that he had gone out. And he, he found her still talking, in the middle of some sentence or other; it was of no importance! He found his place again, laughing and absent-minded: she was his music-box. . . .

At what moment did these flights take place? Principally in the night. During the day he had raced about so, with legs and brain, that he fell asleep as he was undressing; they skinned his breeches off him like a rabbit; he was asleep already, fallen sideways across his bed, his hands caught in his buttonholes. They laid him lengthways, they put his little bare feet and his little firm plump hindquarters into the bag of sheets: he felt nothing, he was gone, he looked like one of the blessed. They were blessed in looking at him. He was not heard moving again till morning . . . Yet he always awoke at break of dawn, with the birds in the garden; and nearly every time, for the space of a few minutes (perhaps five, perhaps less, but he might have thought it an hour or two), he had a soaring flight, in which his mind vibrated

in exalted illumination, very different from that of the daytime. This illumination was partly made up of the phosphorescence of the dreams he had just secreted, the savor and meaning of which he tried to ruminate upon on emerging from sleep. And it was also made up, in that privileged moment, of mysterious forgotten memories, which rose like smoke from his childhood's years where, unperceived by him, they had been registered. A strange wisdom, awakened for a moment, made him find therein the key to those beings to whom his life was linked: his father, mother, Annette, George—his satellites. He scrutinized them, and sometimes he felt an inward shock when he made, or thought he had made, a forbidden discovery. . . . To see without being seen. . . . To see what one ought not to see . . . He had the ring of the Thousand and One Nights . . . Then he fell fast asleep again, until George called him. And he remembered nothing of what had happened during the nocturnal revelation. Yet nothing was lost. Everything was written in that inner book, the editing of which went on night by night. And sudden gleams rose from it, at unexpected moments, during the day. Very rarely in moments of rest, which were full of rest ("I am thinking of nothing") or in study hours (with fixed gaze he followed the track of an idea: "I see nothing else" . . .), but often in full action, at the moment when with tense muscles he flung his ball, or ran . . . when his breath failed him and his chest felt like bursting . . . everything was lit up. . . . Or else (one does not mention it—but since it is done! . . .) when his little behind was functioning on the lavatory—the absurd moment in which the voice of wisdom unexpectedly makes itself heard to certain godly men, and of which our godless d'Alembert said cynically to Lespinasse, that it is the purest pleasure

vouchsafed to mortals. Such great examples authorized Vania to open that door of illumination. . . . "*Spiritus flat ubi vult.* . . ." He would have laughed heartily, if he had thought of it! He was of the land of Rabelais. . . . But he had other things to think of! He dreamed. . . . So much so that when he returned to the society of those who walked erect, he jumped, ashamed, as he heard George say to him:

"Vanneau, button up your breeches!"

He came back from the moon. No one knows what he saw there. But Annette suspected that he had met strange things; she had only to remember her own encounters. She studied the reflections of them in the child's eyes.

They mutually observed each other. They did not know much about each other. They were so separated by time! But they sniffed tenderly at each other, like two animals of the same race; their noses smelt the same odor on their skins, the good smell of dreams of the same blood. . . . When he had run, played, and jousted well with his George, Vania came and sat at Annette's feet, he rested his cheek against his grandmother's thigh and looked at her in silence, while the tumult of his blood calmed down. Annette's hand stroked the face of the little domestic animal.

Then suddenly, the little animal began to think aloud:

"Mannie" (he had combined Mamma and Annette for his own use), "you have been alive a long time now!"

He did not question, he affirmed, yet Annette answered:

"I don't know now. Long or short—from where I am now—it comes to the same thing. When you get there you will see that."

But he was not listening, he was following his own idea:

"Mannie, how have you managed not to be dead long ago?"

"Do you think I am lasting too long?"

"Oh! No. . . . But daddy is dead. . . ."

"He was meant to last longer than me. He was killed."

"Well then, what about you?"

"It is not given to everybody. There are many who live quietly on."

"Yes . . . other people! . . . But not us!"

"Who's 'us'?"

"Us."

(His chin was on Annette's knee, and he dug it in, like a little blackbird boring into a tree trunk.)

"You mean: yourself. How do you know what will become of you?"

"Oh! me," he said calmly, "I shall be killed like daddy."

"But what an idea! There's no reason. . . ."

"Yes. For I shall go and make a Revolution."

"Where? In France?"

"No, not in France. They are too old. In America."

"Is it possible? In my time, we used to go there scalp-hunting. You are thinking of another kind of hunting. And where, my boy? What America? It's big. North? South?"

"I don't care which. The Revolution will have to be made all over the world, won't it?"

"And they will end with France, a good last? The poor old thing! . . . Well, here's a lunatic! . . . Was it your mother who painted you red?"

"Oh! you too!"

"I? Am I red?"

"You are, inside."

"You have got ferret's eyes. Who gave you leave to look inside?"

"I gave myself leave. It's amusing."

"Ah! I amuse you? We amuse you? You find life amusing?"

"Oh! a perfect scream!"

"Then why the devil do you talk of dying?"

"No, not of dying. Of getting killed."

"It's the same thing."

"No. You know quite well!"

"I know nothing."

"You know. To die is when one waits; it's deadly boring. But to go and get killed is interesting."

"It is a serious game."

"The more serious it is, the more amusing."

"The carplet corrects the carp. You are right."

"You are not a carp. You are a trout."

"Why?"

"Is it true that trouts go up the river?"

"It is true."

"And when they come to a dam they leap over it?"

"So they say."

"You have leapt over some?"

"My word, yes!"

"When you were leaping, I was inside you."

(The mysteries of birth did not exist for him.)

"You were."

"Then, I need not go over the distance you have come, again."

"That's true too. I have saved you a good bit of the journey, lazybones."

"Yes, but when you die, I will go on."

"You will go on. For me. Leap, troutlet! Each in his turn!"

She laughed; but in the depths of her heart, she was moved, proud and troubled. She would not die. Nor would her Marc. They would go on.

LXXXII

She recognized that salt taste, that smell of seaweed; all her life had been impregnated by it, by the wind of the eternal. It was the best thing she had received, and she had made restitution. She had impregnated all her race with it.

Her race. . . . Whom? This little boy? All her constellation.

She had other children. The nearest are not always those of the same blood.

She did not forget her American daughter. And Assia did not forget either, though her letters were far between, and they told little of her life: they were either brief and hurried, or they were only an outburst of passions: very few facts. She was caught by American activity and fever—that dry, calculated fever, that high tension of nerves and will which suddenly overcomes the senses and relieves itself with violence. Julien Davy, who had met her in his lecture tours in the United States, was struck by the influence she had acquired, in certain leading circles of politics and money. He had scarcely recognized her at first. She had grown fatter. In drawing rooms she had seemed to him like a beautiful, sleek velvet-footed cat, torpid and indifferent. But as soon as they were alone together the nonchalance instantly disappeared; and it seemed as if the plumpness melted away; her cheeks grew hollow, her lips sharp, and the caressing eyes gave forth gleams of steel. She seemed to be eaten up with passion for the combat. She was carrying on dangerous campaigns in the Western states for the Socialist Labor International and in defense of hunted Commu-

nism. She threw her husband and her husband's friends into them without regard for risks. She had grouped around her a select circle of young Americans—teachers in universities, engineers, writers, independent landowners of vast domains which they exploited for the benefit of social works—rich and poor, for the most part of that New England species, pure, upright, intrepid, a little naïve, of which we know some fine types. Their rather old-fashioned freshness of soul, reënforced by joy of action and uncompromising courage, made Assia smile; but she knew their worth, and she loved them. Her relations with them were, generally, those of a petted and admired sister. They could not be jealous of each other; she belonged equally to them all; and her husband was only one of them, the eldest. She did her best not to rouse troublesome feelings in them. And if it was sometimes difficult to defend herself against the sudden violent urges which erupted from the depths of her nature, she only let them come to light outside that fraternal circle; she fled from it, for a few days, or a few weeks; and not one of the group attempted to discover where she was; her husband admitted that she might need to go away by herself, and that she had a right to dispose of herself: he had recognized that right, once for all, in a serious conversation, a compact sealed between them; and with that loyalty of the best Anglo-Saxons, which the Latins wrongly attribute to coldness (they do not see the warmth of confidence given once for all), he never tried to go back on the compact, he refused to spy upon the hidden life of his companion. She justified his confidence; she employed her flights, her eclipses, in restoring her energies and her command of self—either by plunging into oblivion in some solitary place, as in a sanatorium cure—or by wearing out her old demons by muscular

fatigue, long tramps in mountains and forests. Whether, here and there, unexpectedly, by some chance meeting, the devil came into his own, as evil minds suggested, I do not know; in any case she did not wish it, she avoided temptation. But if it were so, she would not drag remorse and regret about with her afterwards; it was of so little importance, compared with the great, the only sacred feelings! . . . She effaced the memory of it. She returned to her friends and her husband, like a new copy book; the preceding page was torn out; she took up her account book again, exactly where she had left it, more attached than ever to the home (that is the whole group) and the common cause that bound them together. That public opinion might defame them, she and they did not deign to consider.

They belonged to all the great protest movements against the iniquities of American law and power. They spent themselves furiously to save Sacco and Vanzetti and to deliver Tom Mooney from his prison. From one end of the United States to the other, they were on the watch, and they held up crimes and abuses of power for the world to scorn. They had to deal with fierce enemies, "gorillas," the assassins hired and protected by capitalist banditism and hundred per cent bestial obscurantism. Several of these generous young men were savagely assaulted, beaten, tarred and feathered, and trampled under foot. One or the other would perish, murdered and cut to pieces at the hand of the mob. The "Russian woman" was not the one exposed to the least danger. She was denounced by the Ku Klux Klan preachers as a female Satan whom it was a duty to restore to the flames. But her friends formed an ever watchful bodyguard for her. And she had the benefit of certain high protection which kept under cover, which was not anxious to make itself known,

but that she knew of, and that acted secretly to defend her. Even in official circles, there were enlightened men who appreciated the disinterested work of that little League of America's Best, and counted themselves among its members and friends.

However, after various turns of fortune, of which Annette would never hear, Assia was forced to leave the United States. Her husband, whose position she had ruined two or three times, and who never complained of it because he admired her, had had two or three times to seek other fields of activity as an engineer, in Mexico, then in Bolivia and Peru. She went with him, and wherever she passed, a new center of agitation sprang up under her feet. Her passion at the moment was the Indian cause of America; Assia was trying to link it up with the great Asiatic emancipation movements, fomented by the Anti-Imperialist League. She traveled about in the Andes. From time to time, she was seen, tired out, recovering her sleekness and plumpness in the drawing-rooms of San Francisco, or in the big hotels of Shanghai. It is even said that she was seen in the trans-Siberian; she had got into touch with Moscow once more. In this life of perpetual movement she had managed to bear her husband two children: a little boy, whom she had a sudden fancy to take to Annette (he was then between five and six) and a little girl, still too young for the journey: she would go next time.

A few years' separation did not count with Assia. When she came up the road that led to the house on the edge of the Meudon wood, it seemed to her that she had been there yesterday. She forgot nothing. She had three or four superimposed compartments of memory that she opened and shut at will. The deepest, the most secret, was that in which she kept Marc and Annette. She opened

it only at long intervals—by preference during those periods of evasion when she disappeared from the circle of her American friends. For the perfume that rose from the coffer was too strong: Assia choked. . . . "Marc! . . ." Alone, in an isolated house in Cuzco, or in a room in a Chinese hotel, lying full length on the bed or on a mat, for hours, she devoured her memories again, she ruminated upon them till she grew faint with bitter voluptuousness and sorrow. She soaked herself for days and days in their vinegar and sweet-smelling herbs. . . . No, she could not allow herself the luxury of this disturbance in the midst of action. Let the coffer remain closed! . . .

When she brought it back to Meudon, to be opened by Annette's fingers, the trouble was calmed and purified, the bitterness was changed to sweetness: the old days had come to life again without a wound. . . . They did not come into conflict with the new days, the remade swarming life. Annette smiled at the red-headed chubby little American chap, who called her "Madame," staring at her with a shy and serious air, and she pinched his chin:

"One says: 'Grandmother,' my little red wolf. Don't you know that this great girl is my daughter?"

But when Waldo, the little red wolf, found himself nose to nose with Vania, the two boys stared severely at each other. Waldo frowned and distrustfully examined from head to foot this half-brother, who was more like a brother and a half, for he was twice his age. Waldo puckered his forehead; he tried unsuccessfully to understand. Vania understood; he knew what to think about his mother's children; he put on his rather protesting smile, charming all the same, which had mortified his mother more than once, and now mortified the little boy. He thought it his duty to be amiable and to do the honors of the house; he was not far from doing Waldo the honors

of his own mother; for that mother belonged to Vania, if he chose to claim her; he was the eldest son. But he consented to lend her. He even pretended not to be interested in her. . . .

"I have done without her. . . ."

(It was not true. He had never ceased to think of her. But no one should ever know it.)

Waldo conceived a violent animosity towards him. His fists burned in his pockets and, in the end, impetuously came out of them. At the turn of a path in the woods, when no eyes could follow the two youngsters, little red-head, with no pretext whatever, fell upon the elder boy and hammered him with hard furious fists. . . . Bang, bang, bang, bang! . . . Vanneau's chest that received the blows was just on a level with Waldo's nose. Vanneau, who was standing on one foot, nearly fell. He recovered his balance, amazed, and restrained the little ram who was now furiously butting at his stomach. As he bent to expostulate, the little red cranium jerked upwards like a hammer and caught him on the nose. This time, he lost his temper, and seized the other; Waldo wriggled his limbs in vain, in three movements Vania laid him flat on the ground; and holding the wrists apart like a vice, he kept the knees still by sitting on them. He looked at the beetle pinned on its back. He was furious: he had been unfairly attacked, against all rules. But when he saw the crest-fallen countenance of the vanquished, covered with freckles, with eyes piteously blinking, so as not to acknowledge shame, Vania burst out laughing, and put out his tongue at Waldo. The laugh completed the humiliation, tears poured down. Vania threw his arms round the little chap's neck, and the two of them rolled over and over, across the path. They kissed each other heartily, and Waldo, still crying, went at it with the same fury he had shown in beating in Vania's chest. Vania wiped his nose paternally (the last insult to the little man who already thought himself dishonored for having cried! . . . But he had drunk shame to the dregs, and this insult from those hands—explain it who will!—was sweet to him.). Vania, seeing him rubbing his wet cheeks with his dusty hands, said:

"Take care! You'll rub off all the pretty little red spots painted on your nose."

They both roared with laughter. Vania's nose was bleeding. But when they got back to the house, Vania magnanimously said that he had bumped it in running. It was a long time before Waldo could get to sleep that night, he was thinking passionately of Vania.

When the ocean separated them once more, the two children exchanged letters; but Waldo's pen, like his tongue, was awkward at expressing the warmth of his heart. And Vania's pen, which was as nimble as his tongue, found the game too unequal to continue. As when he was teasing the beetle nailed down by his fists, the little elder put out his tongue at his junior. No conversation was possible. But war cries. . . .

"Hallo, Waldo! Hoyotoyo! Brothers in arms! And Allala! The next time we meet I'll drink your blood, you'll drink my blood, and we'll march to battle! . . ."

The compact was no game to Waldo. He did not know what the battle would be. But he knew that Vania's battle would be his. And Assia said to Marc in the night:

"There, you see, you must not be angry with me! I have made another wolf-cub for you. . . ."

She returned clarified from her visits to Meudon. Though Annette had said little (all the time was taken up by Assia's flood of words; Assia reproached herself bitterly for it, afterwards), Assia saw better into herself, after

Annette had seen her. Her breathless tramping, the feverish revolts of her zig-zag course, recovered their direction, and picked up the scent. From Annette's eyes, the Revolution borrowed the very look of Annette, those dilated pupils, opening serenely to the ineluctable march of Destiny, that calm certainty which sees beyond the bounds of the horizon, with its disorderly lines of to-day's combats. We perceive, through it, the beyond of the trajectory which will never end, the eternal murmur of the cosmic tide that never ebbs, the law of worlds in motion where the swirling of the passing whirlwinds are stilled.

But Annette was the last to be aware of what her eyes held. One sees others, and they see you: we know ourselves only by reverberation. Annette became conscious of her hearth only from the fires which it had lit. The old woman, solitary and widowed of her son, discovered her fecundity.

LXXXIII

At that time another line of descent, but of murkier origin, was revealed to her. She received a visit from Bernadette.

The relations between the two women had always been cold and distant. They used to meet, at one time, only on account of Sylvie. And after Sylvie's break with her adopted daughter, they had never attempted to see each other. If Bernadette had felt regret or annoyance at the break, she had not let it appear; she carried her impenetrability to the point of not sending one word of condolence to Annette after Sylvie's death. Annette had not forgotten it. Though she had never known what had happened between her son and this woman, she had conceived a secret antipathy to Bernadette.

Bernadette, on her side, had never shown the least interest in Annette. Even in her relations with Marc, Annette had been left on one side; Annette could be of no use to her. The cold calculating girl, even in her follies of the womb or brain, took no account of that of which she could make no use. . . . Why then had she come to-day?

The two women were face to face. Annette smooth as velvet, but a little harsh to the touch (the eye might be taken in, but not a woman's fingers), forced herself to the obligatory courtesy of one receiving a guest in her house. But as she made polite remarks, her hostile nostrils sniffed at the intruder. They did not sniff for long. Bernadette had not come alone. Annette's eyes which had scrutinized her from head to foot, without appearing to do so, fell upon the little girl who had come with the visitor, and

remained riveted upon her. Bernadette, whose quick, sharp, furtive eyes, like those of a long thin weasel, followed the least movement of her hostess while she spoke amiable meaningless words, saw the glance caught by her bait, and her eyelids quivered for a moment:

"It's done! The blow has struck home. . . ."

The little girl of eight or nine was the restored portrait of another child, whom no one on earth now remembered—except the old woman who was looking at it; for she was the only one who had ever seen him. The little girl had his mobile restless pupils, the fine thin oval of the face, the bony forehead, the pallor and the resolute air. There was still more; even the dress evoked him; the wide sailor collar, the blue coat with large buttons, and the long flat hair, like the little Bonaparte. How had the portrait been restored? How had this woman had the audacity to lay hands on the relic—an old yellowed photograph of a child, of which Sylvie alone, besides Annette, possessed a copy? . . . But the worst audacity was not the outline of the face, the hair, the collar, the coat—but that being inside them. . . . "When and how did she steal it from me? . . ."

The two women did not exchange a word of the violent dialogue going on between their minds:

"Where did you get it?"

"Do you recognize it?"

"No, no, it's a forgery!"

"It's genuine."

But Annette, in a quiet, rather shaky voice, called little Marcelle (the brazen creature had thus signed her) to her knee; she stroked her hair, as she talked; and pulling the child's head backward she plunged her eager eyes into that mirror of her bygone son. Annette was about to hug the child. But restraining herself, she thrust Marcelle roughly aside, and said to the mother:

"Take her away!"

And she rose, pleading fatigue. Bernadette took her leave. She knew very well that Annette would send for her again.

Annette wrote the very next day. But she waited three weeks before posting the letter. And the letter, which was rewritten several times, was no more than a polite invitation to bring the child to see her again some fine summer day.

Vania and Marcelle made each other's acquaintance. They spoke but little. Vania lost his loquacious assurance in the little girl's presence. They never ceased looking at each other, either face to face, or sideways. She soon realized that she interested him. Sometimes he got irritated and was rude to her. But that did not trouble her. The harder of the two was not the one who seemed so. She waited, with deliberate coldness, for the *amende honorable* which would come in the shape of little presents and attentions, sometimes charming, sometimes absurd, which she received as though they were her due. Yet she showed no coquetry or vanity; there was nothing affected in her speech, as in her mother's in society; she spoke little, clearly and to the point; there was a certain tartness about her. That taste of green currants set Vania's teeth on edge, and yet attracted them. That element was lacking in his diet. Annette, observing and comparing them, was surprised that Marc's blood ran more in the little girl's blue veins. But her own blood ran in Vania's.

Bernadette never once betrayed her secret nor did Annette ask it of her. They continued to converse as when paying calls. Annette never set the door of intimacy ajar; she kept the woman at a distance. And Bernadette made no attempt to enter.

But why had she come? What motives had induced her? In such a complicated nature it is not easy to say whether good or evil predominates. They are blended, but by the expert hand of a woman of Paris, who always knows how to make order of disorder, to her own advantage. In her married and business life, she kept her accounts exactly. Marriage was also business—and the business had not been bad for either of the two partners. A well-kept house, increasing income, moderate expenditure, large business orders (the factory made engines for cars and aeroplanes), four healthy children, and a ribbon in the husband's buttonhole. The wife had not been useless in reaching down the ribbon and decorating him with it; and as to children he could not complain; he had at least one more than his due. Let us be just: since the river went back to its bed, after the night with Marc, it did not seem to have any further wish to leave it. She had all she required at home. Few amusements: neither she nor her husband cared about them; what kept them fully occupied was seeing the business profits mount up, not to save or to enjoy them, but that to-day might out-do yesterday, and to-morrow out-do to-day: that is pleasure, like motor racing: the passion for *accelerando*.

But there are breakdowns, in clear country. One does not boast about them. During one of hers, Bernadette, busy repairing her engine, in the greasy dust, under the car, found again, in the warm shadow of memory, the embrace of a night in which the dry and feverish obsession of her youth had found relief. . . . And all said and done, it was the one complete joy of her life; body and spirit had attained their goal: at all events body, spirit and goal, the three had been joined for once; it is what is called victory. And the victory was not dead; Marcelle was alive. There came a day when the better to enjoy

the victory, perhaps to defend it against doubt (Have I conquered? Have I lived? . . .), Bernadette needed to see it mirrored in the only eyes that could be the touchstone. Annette's eyes saw, and spoke. Bernadette's impenetrable heart held jubilee. It was as if she had taken Marc once more. She took him from the mother, wife, and son. . . .

"I have had him. I have him. . . ."

She exhibited Marcelle with provocative satisfaction. The little girl benefited by this repressed pleasure. But she was also sometimes the scapegoat charged with old resentments against the other, the remembrance of which brought back a bitter taste to the mouth. She was not the girl to be upset by it: whether she was shaken or petted, she made her own reflections and kept them to herself: her soul's hide was as impenetrable as her mother's. It took Annette to read the alphabet; it was that of the touchy little drummer of Arcola. Marcelle was Marc as a child, an obstinate proud soul, hiding her troubles and her tenderness, unwilling to tell anyone of them before understanding them clearly, distrusting what she loved more than what she despised or hated: for what she despised or hated, she had already judged. And therefore she mistrusted Annette, and it was her mistrust that drew her to the old lady, like a magnet. Sometimes she left her playmate in the lurch; and while Vania was looking for her in the garden, she came in and sat down quietly in the room where Annette was reading. Perched on a chair, a few steps off, stiff and silent, she watched. If Annette spoke to her she only replied in monosyllables. Annette understood: she knew those stubborn silences, those dumb soliloquies between two, and that look, like little Oliver Twist among the thieves, creeping between the bars to burgle her heart. She kept still, she smiled;

and the smile warned the little thieving magpie that she was caught. The magpie drew back, with ruffled feathers, beak on guard, and savage eye. Then Annette laughed outright, and went and kissed her. It was a little block of ice she held. But ice melts: and Annette whispered in her ear:

"Little humbug, I see you . . . I hold you and you hold me by the collar—which of us will have the best of it?"

Then Annette felt the stiff little body relax and heard a stifled laugh. She nibbled the tip of her ear and said:

"We are friends?"

Marcelle threw her arms round Annette's neck, without looking at her, and whispered in a little corner under her ear, with quick repetition:

"Yes, yes, yes, yes."

It was not in fun, she was sealing a compact. What was going on in her head? That hard little thing, who (God knows why!) felt herself a stranger in her own house, clung to Annette's neck like a swallow to the old eaves of last year's house, which it recognizes; and she found her nest again in that old heart—her father's nest. It was his own smell. . . .

At night, Annette had waking dreams; she saw herself the grandmother of a triple family—quadruple, counting George;—and under the warmth of her feathers she sheltered the quadruple brood, one and diverse. She did not bother to distinguish among the birds those which were authorized by law or virtue. They were all her issue. And the same strength that led her would launch them all, in lozenge formation, in the vast sky, towards the same distant goal which her own arrow would never reach.

LXXXIV

She could also number in her band an adopted son: Silvio Moroni, he for whom her son had been killed. The father had only gained a few months of life by Marc's sacrifice; the fury of his enemies got him: he was found murdered in his bed. But Silvio, deported to the isles, succeeded in escaping in a ship which was flung on the coast of Corsica in a storm. He came to Paris, where he found the exiles, the irreconcilables of anti-Fascism, but he could not join any of their parties; he had the soul of a poet, fed upon the great dreams of Greece and romantic idealism; politics were repugnant to him; he did not fear the combat—his young heart was eager to sacrifice itself but the combat to which he aspired was in the clouds, like those of the gods of Homer—or better, above the clouds, in the light, like that of Icarus. His too literary ideology made the young post-war men, the realists, smile; but not one of them was disposed to place at the service of dangerous "realities" a devotion more complete than the young Italian Shelley gave, in his passionate revolt, to the service of his "literature." He could not stand the atmosphere of discussions and suspicions, of harsh and bitter divisions, or of sticky compromise, among the parties exasperated by the misfortunes of exile. He kept away from them, and he lived alone with his dreams of poetry and action, which were hatching under the gray ash of hard days in which he earned a living with difficulty. Whenever he had a free afternoon, he hastened to Meudon, where he had brought his gratitude and remorse from the first day of his coming; for he did not forget that he had cost Mme. Rivière her son. Annette

did not forget it either; and she accepted Silvio (she told him so) as the price of blood:

"You are mine."

Silvio took the words seriously. He was her liegeman. He loved to proclaim it. He felt it a point of chivalrous honor.

He cheated a little with himself. He would perhaps not have been such an assiduous visitor at Meudon, if he had not been attracted by other eyes. George fascinated him, and he could not hide it from her. His feelings were displayed with impetuous naïveté. George laughed in his face. There were six years between them: Silvio was only just twenty; and George was half way up the hill between twenty-six and twenty-seven. But Silvio did not stick at such trifles. Both were thoroughbreds, tall and strong, well set-up. Approaching thirty, George was approximating to the Manon Roland type, strong and fine, pink and white, bosom firm and abundant. She roused, and dragged after her impatiently, the desire of the men who followed in her wake, and she found them deadly boring. Annette said to her:

"Close your lantern! Dim the flame!"

"What of?" said she. "Do I look at them?"

"You are too full of life. You make them ravenous."

"Perhaps you think I ought to shut up the lantern in my cupboard?"

"I'm very much afraid that even under lock and key they would get wind of it. It smells too strong!"

"Thanks, thanks for the compliment! . . . Then, full sail ahead! . . . In any case I do not smell of stuffiness and dead rat, like these wretched Parisian fellows, these followers of mine! . . ."

The Italian rat was very much alive. George herself could not deny it. She granted him her sympathy. She

admitted that he was good looking and not too silly, when he kept off the subject of love. A good companion, agile, skillful, and resourceful, he did not bore you to death with intellectuality, he had quick eyes, and skillful fingers in drawing, modeling, and wood carving, and was quite at home on the common ground of sport. If it had been only a question of going in together for some match, or hike, or camping party, she would have accepted him with pleasure. It may be added that he could eat—which George could also do very well—and he even had cooking recipes. It was perfect: and George welcomed him willingly everywhere, to table, to workshop, or to kitchen stove, in walking, racing, or at rest—everywhere except in bed, as she told him when he began to make love to her. He was pained and scandalized that she should cut short his lyrical effusions by this crude recall to reality; he protested that his love was pure as fire, and disinterested. George laughed more than ever, and said that she did not believe he was such a mug as that! But if he was, and he must needs sing for singing's sake, would he please vary his subjects, or the object of his songs! It was boring to hear herself played to as Dulcinea. Since he was disinterested, what did the object matter? Let him go and sing in the streets! . . . Silvio sulked, offended. But he began again next day.

Vania laughed with George at his grand words and his white eyes and black pupils; he mimicked them. Annette scolded the two rogues, and pitied the poor boy. George said he was not so poor! Since it pleased him to look at her she let him feast his eyes to the full. As to the sighing, it was a complaint of growth, like hiccoughs; he would grow up!

After all, this régime suited them both pretty well. They were attached to each other. But George remained

an enigma to Silvio. She was a woman, so very much a woman, and so little! That warm life, that tall fine healthy body, that greedy mouth, those opulent pointed breasts . . . But that flesh in flower and fruit, like a grove of lemon trees, was untroubled either by heart or senses. She realized, with little emotional expense, that moral independence of woman, which Annette had sought all her life, but which her passionate nature had only allowed her (and even that was not so sure!) in her latter years. George was not hostile on principle to love and union, free or licensed; but she was in no hurry to taste it; she said:

"Bah! Let's talk of something less boring!"

Silvio threatened her that some day nature would take its revenge. George said:

"That would be funny!"

She was too knowing to assert:

"Fountain, I will not drink of your water!"

But she said:

"I am not thirsty."

She added that doctors advise us not to drink till after eating. If therefore she should happen to get married (all misfortunes may happen!) she would marry only after she had eaten her slice (and no small one—her mouth was large) of her good personal life. Marriage is a house of retreat. . . .

And Vania? And the child? . . . Damned children! . . . She had no intention of doing without them. . . . One or several. . . . Half a dozen. . . . And by no means adopted and nameless ones, like those the neuter ants lick for the state. . . . "No, damn it, no! I don't care a rap for the state, for anonymous society! I say, my own, a child of my own, that I have made myself. . . ."

"Well then? . . ." said Silvio.

"But mine alone. No tiresome male in the matter! . . . Why ever can't one make them alone? . . ."

Annette, amused, said:

"It will come. Nothing is impossible to science."

Silvio looked horrified. He took everything seriously, and the two women played up to him. He discussed their mischievous remarks passionately. Don Quixote, lance at rest, charging the windmills. The windmills passed him on to each other, from wing to wing. He found himself flat on the grass, and saw them both laughing heartily. . . . The she-devils! . . . But however susceptible he might be, their laughter was not in the least offensive to him. He loved them, and he knew very well that they loved him. Not in the way he would have liked. But whatever the way, he was not such a fool as to refuse it. . . .

The only thing about George which he deplored was the brazen positivism which she paraded. And that Annette should seem to accept it! George boasted of a complete absence of all moral prejudice; in an obscure reaction against what had weighed on her father's youth, she had, she said, cut herself off long ago from all spiritual feeling, even in the most secular meaning of the word, all the "categorical" rubbish; and she thumbed her nose at the mention of the venerable "imperatives."

And Silvio who believed in them without discussion, with a Mazzinian candor, was pained by this moral atheism.

But Annette knew what to think of it: she knew George better than George knew herself: that absolute purity of nature, in which George would see nothing but an instinct for cleanliness; that great love for Vania, that passionate fraternity which George could not have explained, but

to which she would have sacrificed herself without hesitation; many other deep unreasoned feelings which, though she never suspected it, were of the nature of a faith. . . . And most curious of all, this clear girl, whose life seemed to go on without a shadowy corner, in a light of gay good sense and health—everything laid open, nothing concealed—lost her self-control the moment she took up her violin. She played incorrectly, but at the first touch of the bow, the presence of the demon was felt. From the four strings she drew soul cries which seized upon the heart and wrung it. Her own eyes and features were transformed. She grew pale. Her closed mouth grew hard. The bones of her tense forehead showed. She bore the stamp of tragic gravity. A cruel peace. And suddenly, gusts of wind across the plain, gallops of joy and anger, slashings of the bow à la tzigane. . . . All the household kept silent to listen to her. But everyone kept to his own room, and she to hers; and they were careful not to show themselves; she would immediately have thrown down the bow. Vania was the only one she would tolerate—on condition that she could forget him: he lay on the floor, sprawling on the bedside rug: he dug his fingers and nose into it; in his emotion his nails pulled hairs out of the Thibetan goatskin. When George came back to herself and him, she boxed his ears. . . .

Silvio stood in the garden smoking, leaning against the wall near the window; and sure of not being seen in the dark, he silently let the big tears run down his cheeks.

Annette, sitting in her room without a light, her heart illuminated, listened to the unknown god who was passing through her daughter's heart.

LXXXV

First let us strike the keyboard! Dissonance—suffering—is an element of harmony in the chord; and sorrow, like death, has blunted its spur. . . .

Annette had known a time when the spur plowed her heart; she turned it in her side with desperate passion. But now the Eve of St. John had come, when the soul danced with the flame that rose high and straight from the pyre! . . .

"He attaineth Peace, into whom all desires flow as rivers flow into the ocean, which is filled with water but remaineth unmoved. . . ."[1]

Annette now lived with double vision:—one on the plane of the passing days of which she was still a part, as the man at the prow of a ship cleaving the waters is part of the crew;—the other in the depths of the interior gulf, into which she fluttered down like the leaf of a walnut tree whose trunk bends over the side of a slope. And she did not know whether it was she who was going down or the abyss which was rising. But there was nothing terrifying about it. It enveloped her in its serene darkness; and at length she had acquired the power of seeing in it. Her prominent eyes had taken on the downy glance of the owl. Silvio and George had both remarked it for themselves, and one day, when they were exchanging their impressions, George pedantically (her learning was no cumbersome luggage; she was proud to display it) evoked Pallas Athena. Silvio made the forehead and eyes, with no face, between outstretched wings, in a strange

[1] "Gita" II, 70.

medallion, which he carved on a piece of wood cut from a pear-tree; and he nailed it over the lintel of the front door, like a crucified owl. Annette was the only one who did not recognize herself. She left the whole house at their disposal, reserving to herself only her own room, and then in her room, a magic circle which grew smaller day by day, but held a whole world within it. She looked, absently, at the large eyes of the medallion, open on the threshold, smiled and said, never suspecting that they were her own:

"The bird keeps watch."

"Yes," said Silvio to George, "I can only imagine her with open eyes. Have you ever seen them closed?"

"I have seen them closed," answered George, "but I don't trust them. She is watching, under her eyelids."

She was always looking, without and within. The two planes, in the end, had merged into one. The eye had taken possession of the dwelling; it occupied the whole of it. Annette, who had suffered all her life from her excess of lucidity, had reached a point where she could not lose consciousness. She lived in a state of clear, calm insomnia, in which consciousness burned perpetually without noise or smoke, like a night-light, but consumed the oil in the lamp.

Every state that is prolonged tends to the *nihil*. Its intensity does not defend it. In continuity, all and nothing are twin brothers. The most poignant carnal contact, if it is not interrupted and renewed, melts into the gulf of being. Perpetual consciousness resolves itself into a light without shadows, therefore without definite contours. The solitary eye fills everything, and nothing limiting it, it loses itself. The owl with widened eyes can no longer distinguish between the blinding light without, and the clear darkness within. And, at the same time as

Annette identified herself with other beings—one after the other, or all together—she despoiled herself of her own being which possessed them. What, then, did she possess? Nothing? Intelligence and love were her organs for prehension of the universe. But if that being, if her ego, of whom those organs are part, escape from her possession, it is the universe that drags it away like a harpooned shark at the end of the rope. And the ship is empty on the sea.

Annette hastened to plunge, to escape the anguish of that dreadful solitude beneath the sun. But she knew that a day, an hour, were drawing near when she would have to come to it. She would have to die *alone*. And at the thought a cold sweat moistened her temples. To die is nothing to an Annette. And it is nothing to cast aside the useless clothing, the shirt of the body, its fevers, and fatal enchantments. . . . But the dearest affections, must they also fall away, in the end? . . . She grew tense, she said: "No!" But did "No," or "Yes," belong to her? Would she be called upon to dispose of them, when the unknown forces disposed of her? . . . (She could feel them already, working in the depths, they had begun to dispose of her. . . .) She was too sincere to close her ears to the dark rumbling of what was coming. . . . She spread her hands flat on the bed, fully determined, and she said:

"To every day its battle! . . . We will fight on to the end."

LXXXVI

Her two friends, companions of her age and combat—Julien Davy and Count Chiarenza—were far away. Their voices were rarely heard and seemed to come from other planets.

Bruno had returned to his pilgrimages in Central Asia. He was taking part in excavations of dead cities, buried beneath the sand. He seemed to be sinking into it too. He disappeared for months. At long intervals a note in the press, misspelling his name, announced some discovery he had made of Sumerian inscriptions. His faithful voice rarely missed the call of an anniversary: Marc's day. If it was not there, it was on the way. It sometimes came from places far distant from those in which the newspapers, always behindhand, had reported his presence; he said scarcely anything about what he was doing, what occupied him. He resumed the conversation about Narada, with ingenious variations; it was like the theme of his thoughts. There was not much more that he could teach Annette about it; she also could embroider variations upon that theme. But neither of them was in a hurry to bring back the glass of water! . . . The Western soul does not surrender. Act, act, act, eternally. . . . Goethe, at the point of death, said: "*In me, the conviction of survival comes from the idea of activity.*" There are many of us in the West who do not care about survival. But not one of us—those really alive—would renounce a day, an hour of activity, in exchange for eternities.

While Bruno let himself be lulled by the murmur of the formless, shoreless ocean of the Infinite, he persistently busied himself in deciphering and conquering, inch

by inch, a little more of the field of man, the finite. Over there in the deserts, he was fighting (he did not say so) a battle against the sands, thirst, hunger, the sun, the cold, against man and nature and against his body, his old steed that stumbled and asked for mercy. . . . "Keep on! . . ." And (a thing he mentioned still less) he was clandestinely involved in the social movements fermenting in those peoples of Asia; his archeological activities, though real enough, were but a screen for him; he was in touch with the peasant and labor societies of India, whose leaders were imprisoned at Meerut; he perilously forced the blockade that weighed upon the province of Peshawar, in a state of siege, and served more than once as an intermediary between the scattered members of the National Congress of India; he had made himself the missionary of Gandhi's *Satyagraha*, which the British oppressors thought they could stifle in the Poona jail; and he propagated outside India the message of the man who alone still upheld the dam, on the verge of collapsing, against the roaring waters of violence. Non-violence or violence: by both ways, on both its feet, with measured tread, Revolution marched on and drew near. They are two branches of the same tree. . . . "*Uno avulso, non deficit alter.* . . ." Bruno was one of the pioneers of the army. Though spirit had far outstripped action in Bruno, when action took possession of him he gave himself to it wholeheartedly.

And his Western friend, Annette, who had already packed her trunks, and was ready to move out, with no thought of returning, had never cultivated her garden with greater love. Although she had to keep still, all the outside world came to the mind that drank it in. All outside belongs to the mind. The mind takes it in. Annette who sincerely thought she had renounced every-

thing, had only renounced herself—she had in no wise renounced taking from what was outside. She was unaware of it; she was acting in good faith. But if she forgot herself, in good faith, it was because she had too much to do to remember that she existed; what existed for her was all that was without, all that was beyond; she was eager to know, to embrace more, a little more, yet a little more, of all that she was about to leave. She endeavored to espouse the mental life of her two friends. She closely followed the Orientalist publications, and the scientific reviews. As best she could she had caught up with the train of Western thought. Julien Davy helped her again, as he had done in their youth, when they talked in the Bibliothèque Sainte Geneviève.

The thought that Marc had stolen from his mother's eyes that summer's day, on the mountain, when Annette, in dreaming, had betrayed her secret, was never mentioned between her and Julien. Perhaps Julien also had read (thought he read) the secret, but he was too humble, and too timid in love, not to doubt it. And he had quite realized that Marc's death had put an end to any plan of life together; the dead alone reigned in the house. Julien understood it, and effaced himself. And yet their hearts had never been nearer together. A grave and tender secret understanding had come about between the old man and the old woman. No need of words to express it.

At long intervals, Julien came to see Annette, between his long journeys for lecturing and study in America, where the Carnegie Fund had appointed him to a post. Then they devoted a few days to each other. And it even happened, some evenings when the conversation had been prolonged, or the weather was too bad, that George gave up her bed to her father, and camped out

in Vania's room. She who was always awake, Annette, thought on those nights that she held her brood under her wings—and her old husband. Julien did not sleep much either, and he scarcely dared turn over in his bed, so clearly did he feel the breath of his companion against his back; and he was afraid that a movement might shatter the illusion. He would, no doubt, have been just as afraid if the illusion had come true. For his feeling for Annette was at once too strong, too pious, too long repressed and bruised, to make it possible for him to express it. When she was dead, he would perhaps think with sorrow, like the old stone cutter of Florence, that he had never kissed that living mouth. He was of those who would never learn to do without the taste of regret.

Those who could do so, like Bruno, seemed to him (however great his esteem for them) secretly monstrous. That power to forget, was it weakness? Was it egoism? Or lightness? It might be any of these: not one of them was lacking in Bruno; they were blended with his heroism and his goodness; he was endowed with that happy "Italian nature," in the depths of which—along with passions, and sorrows and joys—is deposited a good dose of indifference. Those he loved well, he loved well, but he forgot them . . . oh! completely! . . . for months. Annette knew it, and smiled. Julien could not understand that smile; he did not discuss it, he bowed down, since the smile was Annette's; but that smile also made him anxious: was she then making a pact with forgetfulness? Yet, God knows, he would not wish to see the furrow of sorrow on her brow uneffaced! He loved her too much not to rejoice that she had left the killing burden of the past upon her road. But that "rejoicing" was sad, like all Julien's joys. He said nothing about

it to Annette. She understood it, and she put her hand on his forehead:

"My poor Julien!" she said. "How badly you need a flood of Lethe! . . ."

He opened his eyes in astonishment. She laughed and repeated Goethe's words, in German:

". . . *an ethereal flood of Lethe* . . ."

He frowned, and said:

"I don't want it."

"A little glassful from the spring every morning."

"No, no, I want no cure!"

"Very well," she said, "let's keep your illness. Can not the two of us turn it to good purpose?"

"I would not put it off onto you, for anything. It would be a sorry gift. Too much emptiness. There are moments when I hardly dare move, I am so afraid of injuring the faith of those I love more than my life."

"Listen," she said, "to the words Bruno has sent me as a New Year's gift: *'When we have no further belief in anything, the moment has come to make gifts.'*"

He was struck. The words roused an echo in the depths of his being. But his mind distrusted anything that went on beyond the control of his reason. He asked:

"When one has nothing, what gifts are left to give?"

Annette, in her singing voice, recited the hymn of Milarepa on his deathbed:

The thought of Nothingness is the mother of pity.
Pity abolishes the frontier between thee and thy neighbor.
By the identification of thyself with thy neighbor, thy neighbor is realized in thee.
He who realizeth his neighbor in himself, he cometh unto me.
He who cometh unto me shall be Buddha.

Julien was silent, after she had finished. Then he said:

"It is beautiful. . . . Too beautiful for me. . . . I shall never be Buddha. . . . But you, but you, Annette? In Heaven's name tell me that you are not!"

Annette laughed and said:

"How selfish! . . . Alas! I really think I shall remain Annette, to the end."

He breathed again.

"Ah! What luck!"

"To the end," she repeated, threatening him. "But afterwards, afterwards! . . . Monopolizers who hold me! . . . Ah! What luck to escape!"

"*Afterwards, afterwards!* . . ." he said skeptically. "Let me have: *before!*"

He grew sad:

"I have never had it."

She brought her young old-woman's eyes close to his:

"Dear bungler! . . . Not even capable of having what he has never had! . . . And yet I have it."

He said:

"The past?"

She made him a sign to listen. George's joyous voice was heard in the garden.

"Your past . . . It is mine."

He bent over her hands, and kissed them.

"It comes from you."

Past, present, and even what will be—a moment comes when all seem to be on the same plane. On has communion with all the living.

That communion is perpetual. It is disquieting. It is subjacent; we realize it, unawares, at every moment of the day. We feel ourselves slipping . . . Annette perceived it, by the pang at her heart caused by some piece

of news read in the newspapers, or told her: floods, massacres in China, persecutions here or there, world sufferings—or world joys (they are rare!) . . . They multiplied in her blood, through all her limbs. The body participated in them before the mind. The womb—the arch that covers the sacred field of labor—is like a shell in which all the palpitations of the earth reëcho. The cord is not cut that attaches it to the child World. Who touches the child, touches the mother. And the same waves, warm or icy, flow over them. . . . At night, Annette sank herself in the bruised delectation of that strange maternity. And she murmured with closed eyes:

"Little child, little child World, were you not better off within me? Why did you come forth?"

LXXXVII

Souls in the world are bells, some distant, some close at hand. There were days when Annette thought herself back in that hour on the mountain when she lay beside her son in the rough grass, the wild mint and blue-eyed gentian, and heard the Angelus rising from all the tufts of the valley. All the bells do not keep together. Some begin, others finish. Certain steeples are silent. The straining hallucinated ear continues to follow the vibrations in space, after they have ceased. Bruno's bell was engulfed. Annette was the only one who still perceived it. And perhaps it was her memory that prolonged its sounds. There had been no news from Bruno for more than a year. Dead or alive? Disappeared during one of his dangerous missions? The last letter received from him had spoken vaguely of his approaching return. Since then, the few friends with whom he corresponded seemed to have lost all trace of him in an India which was virtually in a state of siege. In what *ashram* had he, at last, forgotten time? Or had he gone beyond time? An inexplicable feeling made Annette believe so. From a certain day, at a fixed hour (but at the moment she did not think of noting them), Bruno ceased for her to be a distant friend whom one imagines walking and laboring on some portion of this earth's hard crust, and for whom one's heart is anxious, seeking to follow his footsteps. He was in the half shadows of the room, in the light and shade that envelop every moment. There was no longer any need to evoke his face and voice. He was mingled with her breath.

Another bell was about to take its flight from the steeple; but no one had a presentiment of it. Annette had no suspicion that Silvio's days were numbered—numbered by himself. And yet she had a good deal to do with the young man's decision. It is a curious phenomenon that this woman, whose body was halfway out of life and whom a worn-out body, illness, and interior detachment had removed from the sphere of action, without seeking action radiated it upon those who approached her. Just as Marc's sacrifice came from her, the mother who wished (and what mother does not?) a long life, peaceful and full, for her son—other flames of sacrifice were to be lit from her calm fire, without her willing it. It was just that detachment that fascinated and fed young energies, which did not know themselves and which were eager to devote themselves. Her apparent immobility was a crater containing a burning lake of matter in fusion. The lake seemed to sleep without a ripple. But one could not approach it without feeling its heat in one's face, and that heat penetrated to the marrow. Fire needs no words. To him who touches it, it says—"Burn"! . . . The calm woman had only to look at one. If she had believed it (who knows?) she would have shut her eyes.

Alone with Silvio, she listened to him, as he confided to her the cruel bitterness of exile and his shame for the people he had left walled up in the silence of the tomb. Then she had only to lay her hand on the bowed head of the sorrowful young man seated beside her for him to hear:

"Awaken the dead from the tomb! Do you not know at what price the *Risorgimento* was bought? Go and pay!"

Annette's mouth remained closed. But her palm had

transmitted to the forehead the silent command of the spirit.

It was enough that just once she had looked at him and said:

"Are you not Mazzini's son?"

Not a word more. He had raised his head, as from a baptism that had washed the darkened soul and restored its certitude. He was no longer overwhelmed by destiny. He saw his own destiny and burned to fulfill it.

He said good-by to the villa at Meudon. They received brief letters from him, but only at long intervals. They heard indirectly that Silvio was earning a living as interpreter in a London hotel. It was not surprising. Exiles without means accepted, begged for, any employment. Annette endeavored, through Julien, to procure him a modest allowance which would enable him to continue his studies at the University in Paris. Silvio refused it, without explanation. He seemed bent on saving a little money. They did not know for what purpose. And as his friends insisted, he ceased writing to them. He was sickened by the noisy but ineffectual pawing of the ground of the anti-Fascist emigrants, by their everlasting discussions, their dissensions, their suspicions, their paucity of active idealism, their verbosity, their decaying old parliamentarism, which could no longer keep pace with the new world. . . . He was urged by the reaction of youthful healthy vitality to the ardent conception of a desperate act of heroism, which would slap the world's cowardice in the face. The poetical romanticism of a belated young Shelley was blended in him with the stoical faith of his spiritual father, Mazzini. . . . They lost all trace of him for a year. Annette alone, seeking it at night as she lay in bed, listening to the rustling of the trees in the forest, had

an undefined presentiment that some day the fugitive would come from the forest for some unexpected action.

That year, there was another brief reappearance of Assia.

She was again a widow. Her American husband had left her on the way. She wore out her companions on the hard stones of the road trodden by her invulnerable heels. Howard Drake had died of his punishment, on coming out of the foul prison into which he had been thrown and tortured in Peru. They released him, dying of typhus. He was alone. Assia, summoned too late, traversed the whole of America only to arrive after he was under ground. But to his last moment he had retained his full confidence in her. He regretted nothing. He left a message in dying:

"Thank you for everything! Darling Assia, do not stop, go forward! And good luck to your good legs!"

The legs had continued their race. Assia, with her brood of little red-haired Yankees, had returned to the U.S.S.R. where her knowledge of Indo-American circles was appreciated. She had been charged with various missions. It was during one of these that she put in once more at Meudon. They found her bronzed, tanned, hardened, the palms of her hands rough, as the soles of her feet must have been, but without a line on her face—except now and then the hard furrow between the eyebrows—the skin of cheeks and forehead smooth and firm, impermeable to all trials of heaven and earth. She brought Vania strange relics of her wanderings: silver white reptiles' skins, grotesque and terrible fetishes, a dagger with a handle of carved horn: every present was accompanied by a short account of the circumstances in which she had come by it. Brevity increased the strangeness. But to Annette she presented a painted box of Palekhi lacquer, on which the

peasant artisans of Russia had depicted a wild but ordered round, danced in a meadow which recalled Byzantium and Ravenna.

She was struck by the alteration in Annette's appearance; those who saw her every day did not notice the change. Taking George aside Assia asked to be telegraphed at the first alarm; wherever she might be, she would come. George did not think of taking offense at her imperative tone: like Vania, she was secretly impressed by that dare-devil life; and this woman, whom she did not love, awed her, less by what she told than by what she did not tell and that one imagined. Not that Assia troubled to hide anything; she had in no wise amended her indiscretion in confidences (except as to what concerned her service); but she was in a hurry, she cut short the narrative with an edged word, and an abrupt laugh, in the middle of a sentence; and it was just at the most thrilling moments. She left the imagination overexcited. She saw it, she saw Vania's eyes begging for the rest. Her hard eyes laughed. She said:

"Later on! I have no time. You'll see for yourself, later on."

She went off again. George and Vania still followed her with their eyes, into space, after her wake had disappeared. They talked oftener of what was going on in the red forge of Russia. Vania's interest and pride were spurred by the rare, short, crumpled letters he received from his half-brother, the fox-cub Waldo. The youngster of ten was puffed up by his new Muscovite importance. He spoke of "*our*" Five-Year Plan, as if he were driving the coach. He was an "*Octobrian*" (it was the title of babies of his age); but he proudly announced that he was about to attain the rank of "*pioneer*": it implied austere duties of which he was as proud as if they were

rights. He was in haste to become a "*shock worker.*" He asked, in a tone of patronizing pity, when Vania and the laggards of the West would decide to get a move on, and make their Revolution at last. Vania roared with laughter at his conceit. He saw Waldo's snub nose, powdered with freckles, crowing as he snuffled, while the little Hercules, with outstretched arms, carried the "quinquennials"—the work-pounds of the Five-Year Plan. But he was secretly vexed that he could not answer the question. He was still more vexed at the Polytechnic labor training that Waldo was getting in his Moscow school. The lycée of Vanves seemed to him a back number. Though he had got leave to take outside lessons in carpentry, it was not under live working conditions (concrete, as they said out there), with the companionship of those workshops where Waldo and his comrades learnt the technique of wood, leather, or metal, while producing articles of use to the Community. One did not play at being a workman out there, one was born a workman, and coöperated from childhood in the great work, because, out there, all together they made one body. And Vania envied them, he the little individualist, son, grandson, and great grandson of individualists. His healthy instinct—and very likely, his secret confidence in his own strength—told him that, in the vast body of a vigorous community, his individualism would only find more space, and that he would know how to fill it all.

He asked George, who was ignorant of them, to enlighten him upon the Marxist theories, and their application in the Soviets. George set herself to study them seriously, and grew interested. She had too much jovial good sense and French skepticism to enroll herself in such an extreme political cause; but on the other hand she was completely indifferent to all risks that any social upheaval whatever might entail upon her, and hers—especially

hers, her property. Risks make half the pleasure one finds in living. She calmly began to translate from German, and then from Russian, which she learnt for her own pleasure and Vania's, a series of subversive pamphlets for which she received an offer of publication; and they proved a shock to her bourgeois relations and friends. She acquired the reputation of a Moscow propagandist. She laughed all the more. She made fun, impartially, of those who excommunicated her, and those who annexed her. She remained free and at rest in the midst of unrest and uncertainty, in the "*Advienne que pourra*"—though without the support of the "*Fais ce que dois*" of her worthy father. "Poor father!" . . . He who deliberately risked much more than his daughter did, for his opinions, always needed to cling to some "duty," some shadowy absolute, a survival of his defunct religious faith. He could not understand that his daughter could move about, fresh and joyous, in the perpetual change, in the fluidity and relativity of these times, like a fish in a river.

"From day to day! I accommodate myself to all days. And if they bring me a 'cropper'? I shall be quite able to find my feet again. I can ski, I can jump. Blow up, Society!"

The humanity of centuries of order is terrified at the mere idea of the catastrophes that lie in wait for the species at the crossroads. It does not consider that the species changes and adapts itself to catastrophes, as to order. Even as its skin learns to be content with the bite of polar frost, and the scorch of the equatorial sun, humanity can establish a harmony between itself and whatever catastrophic circumstances surround it. Where the old die, for lack of lungs sufficiently flexible to breathe, the young gayly disport themselves. And perhaps the breathable order of their fathers would mean asphyxia for them.

Great Gods! George and Vania would not have exchanged the climate of their times, heavy with storms, and their gusts of wind for the most Elysian of climates!

The birds that fly in the tempest do not make the tempest. But it makes them. Where the thermometer, for those of yesterday, registered fever, they find their normal temperature. Reason, instructed by those of yesterday, is also carried away by the tempest; it has crossed the threshold of yesterday, and at a bound it reaches other conclusions. In vain might the mind wish to remain independent of the battle, the temperament has taken sides before the consciousness has understood it. However absurd class war might seem to George, she was on the other side of the barricade, under the "proletarian" flag, when she was still laughing at the name "proletariat."

And there came a night when George and Vania, who had gone abroad with Annette on a short trip so that she might consult a heart specialist, had left her at the hotel, and had gone for a stroll in the streets. Annette saw them come in immensely excited, with blazing eyes; George was laughing provocatively; Vania, with raised fist, showed a machine gun ball, which he had picked up in a square where suddenly, without warning, armed force had fired on an unarmed crowd of strikers. And George said:

"It will be used against the enemy, next time."

"The enemy?" So there was one for George. She had made her choice? No, not she. It was he, the enemy, who had chosen. Though you may wish to deny the concept of class, it is brutally imposed upon you by a dominant class, to which you perhaps belonged by birth, but from which you expatriate yourself, shaking it off like mud from your shoes when you see that to assure its profits and its frauds, being no longer able to support itself on the laws upon which its democracy rested, it violates the laws, overthrows its own democracy, and appeals to machine guns and special tribunals—or to *Duci*, those renegades of Socialism who, risen from the people, have the people's strong jaws and shoulders, which they sell to the service of the weakened rulers (once the people are subjected, the victors must settle between themselves). Democracy has betrayed itself. It has itself torn up the lie of a régime which boasted of "liberalism" so long as its abuses could be freely practiced. Now that force is needed to assure them, "liberalism" turns into Fascism. War is declared. And it is the party of "order" that has declared it. Order against order, force against force! . . .

LXXXVIII

Annette clearly saw the dangers and suffering in store for those she loved, her children, her friends, all hers. People did not fail to remind her of it—Doctor Villard, Julien Davy. They were surprised at her calmness. She did not think her children were so very much to be pitied! . . .

Philippe Villard did not conceal from her, in his irritation, that his party would have no mercy on Annette and her party. She quite understood that! But they knew that they would both be dead before the struggle. And they defied each other with a smile of war and friendship.

Julien Davy's habitual pessimism had grown stronger. On his last return from America (it was just after the Hitlerian cyclone; Socialism in Germany had gone down, like a house of cards; the leaders had surrendered without a struggle: defeat of defeats!), Julien expressed his anxiety about the ruin which threatened the liberty of the West. . . . Annette was calm and smiling. She did not think it an irremediable disaster that what they defended should suffer a defeat. The irremediable disaster would be that the defeat should be accepted.

"It will not be accepted by me, and by those I love, by my children, my friends, my comrades—by you, Julien. Then why should we be troubled? We are no longer children who must needs hold what we want in our hands. Ten years, twenty years, a hundred years are nothing to our will. If we know what is just and must be, we know also that it will be. What is written in our spirit is destiny. By our life, by our death, it is fulfilled. And would to Heaven I could still live long enough to make sacrifice

of my life for it! I know at least that all mine will be ready to give theirs with as much joy as I would. Dead or alive, I shall participate in it. . . . *'Quos non accendam!'* . . . We have but to nourish energy and faith in those we love. Only those are wretched whose energy is not equal to their faith (faith is weak in that case!), those who have nothing to sacrifice themselves for. It is a hard epoch, it is cruel, but it is beautiful to the strong. And the weakest physically can be strong. One must be of the stature of one's time."

"Then," said Philippe, "why did you play the pacifist? Why, throughout the years of the war, did you display a horror of war?"

"Because I have a horror of madness. Because that war of the nations was founded on lies and stupidity. Because it was a retrogression to the past. I pity the millions of victims with sorrow and revolt. But it is not so much their sacrifices which make me indignant as the senselessness of those sacrifices. When it is a matter of saving the human community, and its future, there is no question of sacrifices. . . . 'No, it is not a sacrifice!' as Alcestis sings. One knows, one believes, one loves—and one gives oneself."

"One gives others!"

"No. I make others able to see what is worth giving oneself for. But let them be free to decide!"

"They are not free from the moment that you throw your passions into the balance. . . ."

"My reason . . ."

"Your reason be it! It is the blindest of passions."

"Whether we wish it or not, all is combat. The clearest and firmest thought brings about its own action. It weighs upon the decisions of weak and uncertain souls. One cannot help it! And it is well that it should be so. You

would not wish the heaviest not to weigh the most? It is the law of gravitation."

"At bottom, you are more inhuman than I am. You are a stone."

"May I be one of those on which the City of God will be built!"

She broke off, with a melancholy smile.

"And do not forget that I have cemented that building with my boy's blood! The stone bleeds. It is alive."

Vania listened, musing. After Doctor Villard and Julien Davy were gone, he asked:

"*'The City of God.'* . . . Why do you say that? . . . But, Mannie, God doesn't exist!"

(Neither George nor Assia troubled herself about Him.)

It was true, why had she said that? She did not believe what others understood by it. But how express that which fills your heart, that which endures when all things pass away, that which is all those you love, alive or dead, and all the love you have for them, the communion of all beings and the beyond? She smiled. . . .

"I say what I love. The rest is or is not as it pleases."

"You can love only what is."

"Then *it is*, since I love."

Vania tried to understand. Annette said:

"Don't tire yourself! . . . One believes this, and another believes that. . . . It is not of much importance. Words are sign posts on the road. The wind beats them down; the rain effaces them. But what counts is the road, and we have our compass. . . . Let us march on together! One looks to the right, the other looks to the left. But they bravely follow the same road. . . . *'Let us walk in the woods! The wolf is there. . . . Straight for the wolf!'*"

Vania understood that! And he was ready. But the

grandmother remained to him, as to George, full of mystery like the woods. They both felt the same attraction to Annette, not unmixed with fear. She was there, quite close (no one in the world was so close) and very far off. At moments, heart to heart. But they did not know very well what she thought. And she did not always know what they thought. It was not the matter-of-course familiarity of every instant which existed between little Jean and George. It was much less, and much more. Two ages of the world, two different worlds. I suppose that believers of our countryside talk in that way to the Good Lady; they mentally confide their affairs to her, they know she is good, they have faith, they love her. But they are never sure of what is in her. There is so much in her that existed before they did! They cannot quite read her smile and her eyes. And they never suspect that their eyes also hold mysteries for her. There is so much in them that will exist after her! . . .

Annette, dreaming at her open window, night, day, winter, summer, saw the seasons succeed each other. And they seemed to her the same year.

LXXXIX

It was at that time that I saw her for the last time, alone at Meudon, in the house on the edge of the woods. Her children had flown. They ran about Paris and the country. They were absent for days. George had had scruples at first, but Annette removed them (they only asked to be removed!). She urged the brother and sister to take advantage of the fine spring days to make excursions in the Ile de France on their bicycles, or on foot, to sleep at some village on the way, or if weather and place permitted under the stars, and to return next day. She remained alone in the little house, listening at night to the distant barking of dogs. She did not feel forsaken. She followed her vagabonds in thought. Their legs, arms, and eyes, enjoying for her the life that was ebbing, were renewing it. . . .

I found her very tired; too tired even to go into the garden, she was half lying down on the little balcony of her room. Though the light in her very short-sighted eyes was growing dim as it does in a long evening and no longer allowed her to distinguish the passers-by on the road, she recognized me before I had entered the garden. She called my name, and waving her hand to me, she said:

"Come up!"

There was no one in the house; the little maid had gone out without leave, and I spoke sharply of this imprudence. But she begged me not to scold the girl; we could hear, I do not know where, the distant droning of mechanical organs, the noises of a fair; and naturally all the boys and girls were buzzing like flies round the

wooden horses of the merry-go-round; the little maid had slipped off to join them.

"I should have done just the same at her age," said Annette.

"But suppose you should require something?" (I did not like to say "some help," but she understood):

"What can an old woman have to fear? I have nothing left now but my dreams. That is my advantage over youth. I was laden with a heap of goods, which had kept me doubled up under the load, and which for all my efforts I lost on the way. To-day people can steal what they like from me, even my shell. I have got out of it, I only hold to it by the big toes, as to these slippers . . ." (And she took her bare foot out of one) . . . "One is so much more comfortable outside!"

"Stay inside a little longer! Don't throw off your friends! We are your slippers too."

"You are mine, and I am yours. Yes, we are dressed and shod all our lives in those we love: in our relations, children, friends and lovers, and in this good old earth —look at it!—which breathes at us its warm breath of spring; in all these, beasts and men, that cling to our body —and they are sometimes very burdensome! . . . But I am going. It will not be for much longer . . ."

"Don't be so insolent as to flaunt your pleasure at it in our faces!"

She laughed and said:

"I beg your pardon. But, my friend, I leave you your share of pleasure. I am not taking it all. You will go away too. You are going away. Everything we love is going away—this good old earth too. No, I am not selfish! I ask no privileged treatment! What is good for one, is good for all. Equality!"

"Democrat!"

"No! Communist—until death!"

"One with all."

"Yes, the One in all."

"But then where will you find deliverance, the stripping off of all those who ensheathe you?"

"In my river . . . How strange it is!"

(She had closed her eyes as she spoke, and we remained silent for a few seconds, not more than fifteen.)

". . . I have just sunk into the past. I have just seen again, I see once more (God! How long ago it is!) a red pool in the midst of the woods.[1] I was bathing in it, I found once more in its golden waters the sticky mud under my heels, and the slimy weeds twining about my thighs . . . (No, you cannot understand! . . .) I very nearly sank in it. What efforts it cost me, until the floodgate was opened! . . . How? I don't know . . . Certainly not by my own strength alone. I could not have done it alone. But it was opened, and the flood of stagnant water flowed out; the golden water, the sleeping water, with me in it, flowed into the living water of the river. And the river flowed to the sea. I was saved . . ."

"Yes, it is happiness to find one's own course. Life has no other purpose. And as to the rest, the goal, the river takes care to bear us to it. We have but to melt into it. To unite ourselves with the stream of the living. Nothing stagnant. Life in motion . . . The forward march! Even in death, the stream bears us along."

She took my hand.

"Even in death, we will be in the forefront . . ."

I left her upon that promise. As I rose (she excused herself for not rising from her *chaise longue*) I put one of her slippers that had fallen off back on her foot, and I said:

[1] "Annette and Sylvie": The vision at the beginning.

"In memory of our conversation, will you bequeath them to me, if you go first?"

She said:

"Take them now!"

On my way back, going through the forest, I met George and Vania coming home. They were red and tanned by the sun. They recognized me, and I could see very well that they were ashamed that I should have found Annette forsaken in the house. George excused herself awkwardly, with a big uncomfortable laugh. But I did not want to spoil their happiness. I said:

"We got on very well without you! . . ."

XC

When Life is drawing to its close, an hour comes when in flashes the two extremes are identified: giddy motion and immobility are the same. The circle of existence is ending. The two disjoined ends reunite. And the serpent of eternity bites its tail. We cannot now distinguish the future from the past, since there is now neither beginning nor end. What we are to live, we have lived.

When that hour comes, it is high time to pack up. Annette's packing was done when the young courier who was preparing the way for her passed on.

One morning, the 26th of July, the postman brought her an envelope which bore Silvio's large handwriting. Inside were these words:

"Praise to St. Anne, that she may praise the Lord!"

And beneath this:

"Benedica suo figlioul, o gran Madre!" ("O great Mother, bless your son!") And a lock of his hair.

It was indeed the feast of St. Anne. No one in the house, unused to pantheons, had thought of it; but the Italian bell awoke in Annette's memory the distant chiming of the bells that rang her anniversary in her early childhood—and the pictures of Florentine frescoes which she had seen, on Marc's arm. Around the Meudon woods, the summer sky had the flat light of those circular pictures of Perugino, in which the fine proud silhouettes of young trees, like young men, stand out against a silver background. George and Vania had again gone off on an expedition for the whole day. Annette was left alone till evening. She stroked the curl of chestnut hair between her fingers. What a strange offering! It reminded

her of a sacrificial offering in the temple. She blessed the forehead from which the curl had been shorn.

She felt a heaviness in her left arm and her chest that caused her a vague distress. She knew the reason of it. But she wished to take advantage of her children's absence, to do a little tidying about the house. When they were there, they proved themselves severe mentors; George, warned by Doctor Villard, forebade her to tire herself. Annette was generally docile. There is a sweetness when one is old in letting yourself be scolded by youngsters who love you. But at any age, in disobeying them when one can, there is always a mischievous schoolboy pleasure . . .

Annette had her fling, while she was not being looked after. When she had thoroughly turned out all her drawers and cupboards, and gone up and downstairs five or six times, from cellar to attic, and so was already very tired, she decided to go round her garden, and inspect everything; she bent down to clean and caress her favorite plants, she felt the ground, and when she found it dry, she went backwards and forwards between the pump and the little thirsty ones. She did so much that a pain clutched at her heart, she was obliged to drop the watering can, and she sat down on the gravel, pressing her arms against her breast; she could not breathe, pain overwhelmed her; she felt that she was going to die; she looked at her pale hand, from which the blood had receded, and it seemed to her that she was also going to tear herself from it. She felt the pain, but no regret for what she had done. She thought:

"If this is the end, it is better here . . ."

She heard the bees buzzing round her head, and the droning of an aeroplane in the sky—and felt, in her whole body, her great heart. It was near to bursting. Her

mouth was open towards the sky, her eyes were closed; and in her ears the droning of the aeroplane grew louder and louder. It must be passing over her head . . . When she opened her eyes, it had disappeared behind the mass of the forests; the droning and the pain grew less; drops of sweat ran down her temples. With a great effort, she got up and went indoors. She did not want her children to know of her escapade, when they returned. On the threshold of the house, she turned round. Her feet and hands took leave of her good earth.

"Good-night, my earth! Not good-by . . . I shall find you again . . ."

She went to bed. A little later, George and Vania returned. But before she saw them, Annette's ears were surprised. She had not heard the approach of merry voices in the distance, as usual.

They came straight to her room, and they did not see in her face the traces of the battle which had been fought, they did not ask how she was, they were the prey of silent exaltation. George was holding some open newspapers. She said, in a harsh voice, which repressed a choke:

"He has fallen from the sky, on Rome!"

Annette asked:

"Who?"

(She knew, before she had understood.)

Jean, out of breath, cried:

"Silvio!"

Annette took the papers; but in the twilight of the room, which she would not disperse for fear that when the light was lit they might remark her drawn features, her tired eyes saw very badly—but enough to guess from the headlines the mad epic of the young Icarus who, penetrating to the heart of Italy, had dared to confront the tyrant he hated in his very lair. In spite of the

enemy's air fleet, he had flown over Rome in his aeroplane casting upon the fettered *"Senatus Populusque"* handfuls of proclamations calling upon them to revolt, and insulting the dictator burrowing in his fortified palace. Annette handed the papers back to George and said:

"Read!"

George passed them to Vania. Vania read in his boy's voice, which was breaking—a voice that hastened, and stumbled at the end of the lines, as he swallowed his saliva the wrong way. His tones were emphatic and puerile; joy was perceptible under his emotion. George stood silent, with bowed head, as if stupefied. Annette closed her eyes, to hear better . . . She could hear the aeroplane droning . . .

An Italian anti-Fascist newspaper in Paris published Silvio's will, which he had posted at Nice, a few minutes before taking flight for "the other shore." He foresaw it, he announced it, he was seeking death. By this sacrifice he wished to redeem the shame and rekindle the flame *"of the people of Mazzini."* He was repeating the words (Annette trembled) which she had said to him. And he said what she had not said—yet she recognized it, for she knew that he had read her thought . . .

"Why is the land which was that of the *Risorgimento* so poor in heroism? Because it awaits the example of the gift of oneself, of voluntary immolation, the dew of blood that heralds the red dawn. O *Gioventù*, hungry for life, it is for you to renounce your life, to despoil yourself of your hopes, and of the joys and sorrows of your future, to offer them as an expiatory holocaust! It is not murder that delivers, it is sacrifice. I kill the tyrant more surely by hurling the defiance of my death in his face than by killing the dog, trembling in his kennel. . . . People, arise! You do not know your

power. Even without combat, with arms crossed, if you say 'No!' the tyrant falls . . ."

The aeroplane had scattered the word over the Forum, where Cicero denounced Antony who killed him; and it disappeared into the night pursued by the pack with wings of steel. It had not been seen since. . . .

Vania had finished reading. He was eager to continue talking. But the silence of the two women intimidated him. He tried. No one answered. The women mused, motionless in the dark. He, too, was silent. After a few minutes, Annette said, from her bed:

"Go to sleep, children!"

George got up. They left her without having lit the lamp.

Jean went to bed. George had shut herself into her room. The warm silence filled the house. The woods were still. In the phosphorescent summer night the song of the violin arose. Annette and Jean held their breath to listen. It advanced, at first with uncertain step, stopping upon a question, taking it up again, waiting; then it gradually grew surer, and seemed to find its way; it took up the first phrase again, and completed it. It was grave without sadness; and soon the bare outline, which undulated like a branch, flowered into young variations, laughing and clear, like a cherry tree in spring. The wind swept through the branches; they scattered their petals in a rain of arpeggios. The theme returned, bare. Its pure proud silhouette was like a *largo* by Handel . . .

The violin fell silent. Vania slept, his cheek resting on his arm. George undressed in the dark, her body warm, her soul cool and refreshed; she did not try to reason about what was going on in her mind, the violin had done that for her; the affair was settled, all was well . . . She slept, with deep regular breathing.

Annette lay awake once more. But this time, she did not watch in vain. The Visitor was coming . . .

She thought of her murdered sons—Marc, Silvio, lambs of God. They had offered themselves to the sacrifice. She defended herself in vain, seeking proofs in her memory that she had said nothing to urge them on, that they had acted without her. She knew full well that the impulse of their sacrifice had come from her. Beneath her eyes that saw their path before they did, these two children, violent souls, had offered themselves to the knife, almost despite themselves. It was as if she had laid them on the altar with her own hands.

"God of Isaac, who saved him, you did not save my children! You wanted those victims. Are you satisfied?"

But the god was not satiated. She knew that. She knew that he awaited other victims . . . Who else?

"All that you have. All yours."

She vainly endeavored to ignore the fact that the little boy, sleeping there, on the other side of the wall, entirely taken up with his games and daydreams, and the tall healthy joyous girl, who jeered at the world's passions and its hallucinated ideas, would rush straight into the firing line in the morrow's battle, like her other, Russian, daughter, who had enrolled herself in the great Army. They were all dedicated to exalted death in the flame. And day after day she had blindly worked to kindle the flame. She who had wished to warm the heart of those she loved with it, and gather them round it, like a hearth fire, had set fire to her house. The flame which she cherished in her bosom, which in her rose straight up, illuminating without consuming, had melted the surrounding walls and set fire to other souls. Her mission, unknown to herself, had been to bear in her calm hands the torch of action, so as to light her mind with it. Other

hands had seized it, and the wind had blown it back upon her own home . . . The Soul Enchanted and her brood were, like the phœnix, destined to the pyre. Glory to the pyre, if from their ashes, as from the phœnix, a higher humanity is reborn! . . .

"Burn me then, with all mine! The hour has come. Butcher, I offer my neck to your knife . . ."

And she felt the knife driven into her breast. A terrible rending pain pierced her from heart to neck. She clenched her fists upon the wound to keep from screaming. In the fierceness of the pain there was an exalted joy in taking her share in the holocaust of her sons. She pressed the handle of the knife with her fists . . .

"Sink in! . . ."

Until, with clenched teeth, she fainted in a spasm of pain.

XCI

It was the child who, waking with the dawn, heard the strange murmur coming from the next room. It took him some time to grasp it. In his half stupor it seemed to him that some wounded animal was going round the house. Then he grew frightened; he jumped up; he called George. George slept soundly, her head to the wall against which Annette's bed stood. Vania shook her. She resisted: when George was in the pasture of sleep, she needed to take her fill. But as soon as the locked door of her senses swung ajar, full consciousness entered at once. She sprang out of bed, before she had opened her heavy eyelids, and she hastened, feeling her way along the walls, like a blind man, to the bed from which the moaning came.

Annette was unconscious, she did not know that she was moaning. George was terrified at the change in her face. At the first glance she realized the fatal issue of the battle. She lost no time. Philippe Villard was sent for; and Vania ran to send a telegram to Assia. When the doctor arrived he had no further remedies to add to those which expert George had already applied of her own accord: hot or cold reagents. His cool glance was that of an old athlete, used to the ring; it read the chances of the fight beforehand, judged that it was useless to torment the woman who was struggling in the dark; the fight was lost. He would rather have shortened the way for her, as he meant to do for himself, when he saw himself thus defeated. But Annette had refused his offer, when he had made it to her, beforehand: she forbade anyone to

dispose of her will, so long as a drop of life was left in her—though that drop might be a sea of burning pain.

"I will not allow anyone to interrupt the fight. The fight is mine. Leave me alone! . . ."

He left her alone. His large hand, with the iron fingers which could make themselves like velvet, took hold of Annette's already cold feet, between the sheets, and pressed them tenderly:

"Take your rest! . . . Good-by, Annette . . ."

The following night an aeroplane landed near Meudon. A feverish bird knocked at the window; George opened it . . . Assia . . . She had come in one flight. The telegram had reached her in a Scandinavian town where she was on a mission. She started on the instant. Little she cared for what she risked—and there was risk on both sides: in France she was almost sure to be arrested and expelled; and the Party would not forgive her for compromising, through caprice or passion, her official or semi-official position. But though individualism may sincerely place itself under authority, nothing can stop its sudden impulses, and no one—not even itself—can foresee them. With Assia, action had forestalled reflection. Reflection came only when she was installed at the bedside of the dying woman. Let come what might. She had kept her word . . .

"Mother, I am here. I will go with you to the turn of the road . . ."

XCII

She promised what is in no one's power to perform. The last hour has no companion.

Annette walked alone at the end of her journey. Like the gods in the combats of the Iliad, she was enveloped in burning walls of smoke. Those who bent over her prostrate body did not see her, they saw only the wall behind which she walked. At long intervals the woolly thickness grew thinner; an opening appeared; Annette perceived objects through the rent. All around her was an object . . . The voice of that lad she could not see (he was there, close to her head, she had but to turn it, she did not try . . .) no longer roused emotion in her. . . . He is, he is. It is an object . . . The opening in the smoke closed again. She could still hear the voice through it . . . How far off it was! As everything that lives was already far off . . .

She projected the brazier from inside her body outwards. The preoccupations of her mind during the preceding days, together with the phenomena of fever, were externalized, and, at once interpreted in the sense of the dream which imagination was composing, took their place upon the scene . . . She thought herself back in her flat in Paris. Paris was on fire . . . The crackling, the roaring of her arteries, were discharges of artillery and the crackling of fire in burning houses. There was fighting in the streets. And her choking throat recognized the bitter taste of smoke. Through the open window, it was being blown down before her eyes. The fire was gaining, creeping, licking the walls of the house . . . Annette was not surprised to see Assia's face bending over her. She

connected her presence with that of the Revolution. It seemed natural to her that Assia should be there. At the distance from which she was looking, that between Oslo and Paris was no more than that from one room to another. All the earth was now on the same level.

But distance had also fallen from before the mask of life—those eyes, those mouths, those hands, those gestures, those words—and revealed the forbidden spectacle of thoughts which the living hide from others and from themselves. An extraordinary lucidity enabled her to read, by flashes, the depths of those beings separated from her by a curtain. In the beloved daughter, who watched by her bed, she felt in the darkness a hostile soul which was invading Assia against her will. But she reintegrated, in transposing them into her dream, all the depths of the souls which she touched. She imagined that the fire was rising in the house, and that her children were forsaking her. She saw George and Jean escaping through the window and over the roofs. George was apostrophizing the assailants, she looked like a Delacroix Liberty on the barricades, a Revolution with young breasts, singing and chiding; and beside her the boy, armed, and laughing . . . Assia alone persisted in not leaving her; but she was getting impatient for the end, and in her heart she kept repeating:

"Do hurry up! . . ."

And the dying woman, trying to move her lips, thought she said (but no articulate sound came from them):

"I am hurrying. But my old legs can't go very fast. Don't wait. Go away, daughter!"

With weary hand, Assia brushed aside the hideous thoughts. In spite of her fatigue she had insisted on watching beside Annette; she had forced George and Vania to go and rest; she was alone with the dying

woman; and God knows her passionate attachment to Annette! Annette was the only woman on earth she had ever loved. In Annette, she loved Marc. In Annette, she loved the mother—more truly her mother than her mother by blood. She loved the friend, she loved the woman who had trusted her, who had given into the hands of the stranger, the sinner, the outcast, her most precious possession, her son, and the treasure of her intimacy. She loved in Annette the person who had had faith in her beyond what she herself had ever had—who had twice set her on her feet again, wiping the mud off them—who had saved her from herself. It was not certain that, in the last analysis, she did not love Annette more than Marc, and that in Marc it was not Annette whom she loved best. At least in that hour the two were so closely united that she no longer distinguished between them: it was both of them she had just furiously embraced, as she flung herself on the sweating body of the woman in her agony. But at the same instant the hostile soul had entered. Assia felt an icy indifference penetrate her. Loosing her embrace she fell back into a chair a few steps off. She was tired and overdone, from all the energy she had expended during days and nights without rest. She had no feeling of love or interest. She was taken up again with other preoccupations belonging to the shore of the living, from which this dying woman had distracted her too long; she thought of the risks her flight entailed, which increased with every hour she remained in this house: with a hard look at the swollen face resting (struggling) on the pillow, she calculated the number of hours which remained written; and she thought:

"She is lost, in any case. Let her make haste!"

Through the ferocity of subconscious resentment, she took up a brutal book to read, which broke all communion

with the dying woman. However, she could only glance through a few pages, the sentences she read stuck in her throat, she spat them out again. Sickened, she shut the book. And when she looked again at the agonizing face, she was suddenly seized with horror at herself, and terror at her crime of thought. She flung herself upon her knees, and she kissed, with tears, the hand with the swollen veins that was hanging down . . . What had she done? (Thought is action in the face of death.) Instead of helping her in the last assault, she was assassinating the being she had loved the most. She moaned:

"Mother! It was not I! Forgive me! Deliver me! . . ."

But Annette's face remained impassive and distant. The woman in her agony had perceived all; but she had felt neither pain nor revolt at it. It was as though it no longer concerned her. She was alone. Around her death the gulf of the world was being dug; dense smoke was rising from every building: Europe, Asia, everywhere war and Revolutions: humanity was burning at the four corners. And even the sky was blocked by the shield of aeroplanes falling on the asphyxiated towns. What refuge save the window of death? The abandonment of the best loved souls put the finishing touch to her suffocation in solitude . . . But that solitude of the last agony is far from consisting, as is supposed, only in the impassable distance between the living and the dying. The kernel of essential void in that solitude is the separation from oneself which is taking place in the very bosom of the person dying. Annette was no longer in Annette. She who lay dying on the pillow was alone. Her Other, her Double had taken leave. He was moving out. And with him were moving out all that smoke, the noise, the cries, the agitation, all that tumult of crowds and passions,

all the battle . . . The feet of Peace were about to rest upon the ruins of the house. The body stretched itself to receive the cool touch on its fever . . .

But in the spasm of breaking the last tie, the frail cord that resisted, she was brutally drawn back, like a locust on a string, to that suffering clay from which she was trying to escape. Before breaking and absorbing that shape of a soul, that lake of the heart, in which the universe was mirrored, the Mother-Force of all life recalls for the last time to her, who is about to die, the sharpened consciousness of all that she has been: by the contraction of suffering and the effort required for the supreme leave-taking, it makes her strike herself cruelly against the lanceheads and the sharp broken glass upon the walls of her painful envelope. She feels bitterly in all her length and breadth, the limits of that body on its deathbed, between whose partitions she has built, like a bee, the chamber of her life—sixty years of life—that she may measure, at last, in the moment of the "*salto mortale*," in a flash, the span of her life, the reason of her living and her dying. The curtains part. Hasten, and look! . . .

XCIII

She looked eagerly with her large eyes which would soon be glazed. Those who stood round her bed thought she was in a deep swoon. They did not see that she could see and hear. They did not see that she was journeying on, and that she was climbing the last slope. The pain went up and up with her. . . . With a lance thrust it pierced the brain with this lightning flash of thought:

"To suffer is to learn. . . ."

The flash of those words blinded suffering itself. The panting flesh became insensible. Nothing was left now but the eyes—the eyes turned inwards—and the sea-shell of the ear. . . .

She perceived, as from the outside, her own panting breath. The heightened hearing listened for that breath which grew louder, and it seemed like the rumbling of a moving train. . . . Who was moving? She or another? She could no longer distinguish between "hers" and "another's." The frontier stakes have just been blown down by a gust of wind. Not-self is myself. Myself is Not-self. Everything is a dark mass, gathering in the abyss of Night, like dense naphtha in a cistern. The level rises. The mass reaches the edge of the outlet, it swells and bulges, it stops a moment, then overflows; and falls. . . . The flood of lava falls *toward the sky!* Terrestrial laws are reversed. Gravitation pulls us upward. . . .

"I am a River (it was my name, my destiny was written from the first, but is only made clear to-day), River of Being, River of beings, River of ages, that, winding, climbs the rugged mountain side. Below me, as I look down, I see its undefined circles untwining and intertwining. And

above, the outstretched head of the serpent, that rears itself, feeling the sharp points of the overhanging rocks, and drags itself up. And at the topmost peak, and in the background, beyond the summits, the abyss of the ocean-sky."

At every gush, of which the flood felt the tremor from end to end, Annette braced herself: the arrow was about to fly from the bow. . . .

And those around her, who had eyes not to see, saw her thin hands clutching at the sheets. Her pulse ceased, under the fingers that felt it; but she was still listening to the beating of her own heart. She could no longer distinguish even the shadow of Assia's head, whose breath she felt upon her face; but she could hear distinctly the voices that were no longer cautious. Her body, covered with the marks of injections of camphorated oil and caffeine, was externally insensible; but hearing persisted; and in the encroaching darkness all the light was concentrated in it. Last murmurs of the earth . . . The torrent passed, like an express train from the doors of which we have seen the lighted windows of houses we leave behind us. Annette tried to hold out her arms to them, her arms of stone. She smiled: scarcely a gleam was visible on her lips; but Assia with her face pressed closer to hers, caught it . . . The gleam sank back into darkness. The train was far. The traveler was carried away.

Suddenly the torrent reared, the skin bristled, ripples ran over the sheet of water—the sheet of blood. And at one stroke, the whole stream stood still, from heel to forehead: it was of iron, it stretched itself like a gigantic ladder placed against the wall of the mountain, a rack of red hot cast-iron, of which every living being formed a rung; it scaled one of those Alps, which Annette's feet knew so well, where her legs had climbed to the assault, with a

battalion of pines—beyond the frontiers of the forests—a pyramid of basalt, with a mane of glaciers, and a foam of hard clouds hanging to its crest of snow, curved like the beak of a Matterhorn . . . And on the metallic ladder, from the depths of the abyss, a heavy footstep came up which caused a great trembling from top to bottom in all the raised metal, a vibrating javelin launched against the sky. The ladder of hard congealed fire groaned beneath the weight. Every rung quivered with the quivering of the rest, which increased as the step approached; and all from base to summit were bound together in the same quivering. But like the blades of high grass in a field which the wind bows in the same direction, all bent towards him who was coming up, towards the base. And every time the invisible claw gripped a rung of the ladder and crushed it, the whole world inclined towards the point of agony, which as it succumbed, supported the whole weight of Destiny; each living rung that broke, fought and died for all; and the breath of all the living was gathered up in its spasm. But as soon as the fight was over, and the invisible Crusher had passed on, leaving behind him nothing but ashes, the grass, swept back by the wind of the fire, bent again wholly in its wake towards the summit; the calcined rung of life now vibrated with the battles that were being fought above it, in the future. The whole current of being flowed from him whom life had just left, towards those in whom the current would be engulfed, towards the river's mouth . . .

She who was among the living—for an instant longer, only to be present at her crushing in the vat—saw through a mist the mounting step of the Treader of the grapes . . . At every step of his approach the black and red mist grew denser . . . The Great Darkness, with a rustle of folds, covered the sinking soul with the two

sides of his cloak. And the Unnameable rose from the depths with a crash of thunder. The wine-press sank in: all was crushed, all was probed by its myriad spikes; the thighs, the eyes, the mouth, the sex, all is pumped dry; and in that unspeakable pain was the unspeakable delight of the fatal copulation. The crushed soul, relieved, dilated; it became one flesh with the sovereign Being. Being incorporated the soul in emptying it:

"Thou art mine, and I am thine . . ."

O plenitude! Identity! In that second everything was understood, the beyond good, the beyond being. The total "*Erleben*" was completed. The cycle of the Soul Enchanted came to an end . . .

She was now one of the rungs of the ladder which was thrown across the void, at a turning. And when the mounting step rested upon her, crushing her, the rung held firm, in turning; and the Master crossed the abyss, on the outstretched bridge of her body. All the sorrow of her life had been the angle of inflection of the forward march of Destiny . . .

"Advance, Destiny! I thank you for having made me your stepping-stone! . . . I follow you, Destiny. I am Destiny."

The juice of the grape which the Treader has crushed follows the trench: the stream of escaping life is drawn in passionate frenzy, as by a mouth, towards the summit. For the last time a bird's cry rose from below. Vania cried:

"Mother! . . ."

Beloved ones! Oh, you we leave behind us! . . .

They are not left behind us, they are ahead of us. It is on their rungs that the ascending Treader will pass. We who have become his wake, we also will pass over our loved ones, we will take part in their last struggles,

we will help them with our embrace mingled with that which crushes them. As our loved ones, dead before us, have rejoined us, have embraced us, in our death. We journey on together. The same River.

"Good-by, Annette! . . . And now *I understand. Nunc dimittis* . . ."

She sighed. Assia, bending over her mouth, wildly drank in her last breath. But she held nothing but the outer covering. The Soul Enchanted had soared aloft—a cast of seed in the furrow which Death cuts towards the outlet to the sky, at the summit of the mountain—the great floodgate through which flows the Milky Way, necklace of the nights, serpent of the worlds, which unfolds its coils of Being in the meadow of the Infinite. . . .